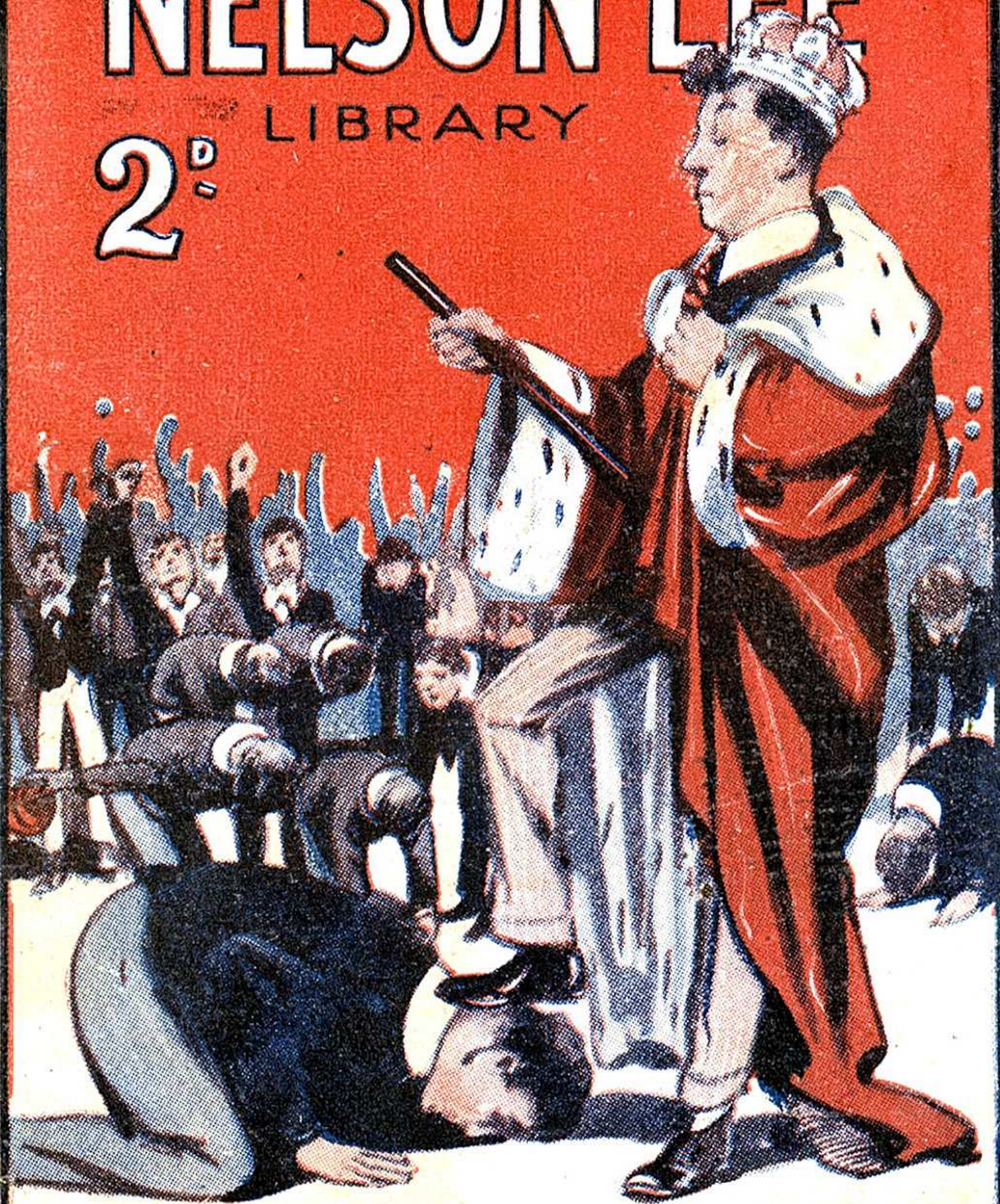


HANDFORTH IS FUNNIER THAN EVER THIS WEEK!

THE **NELSON LEE**

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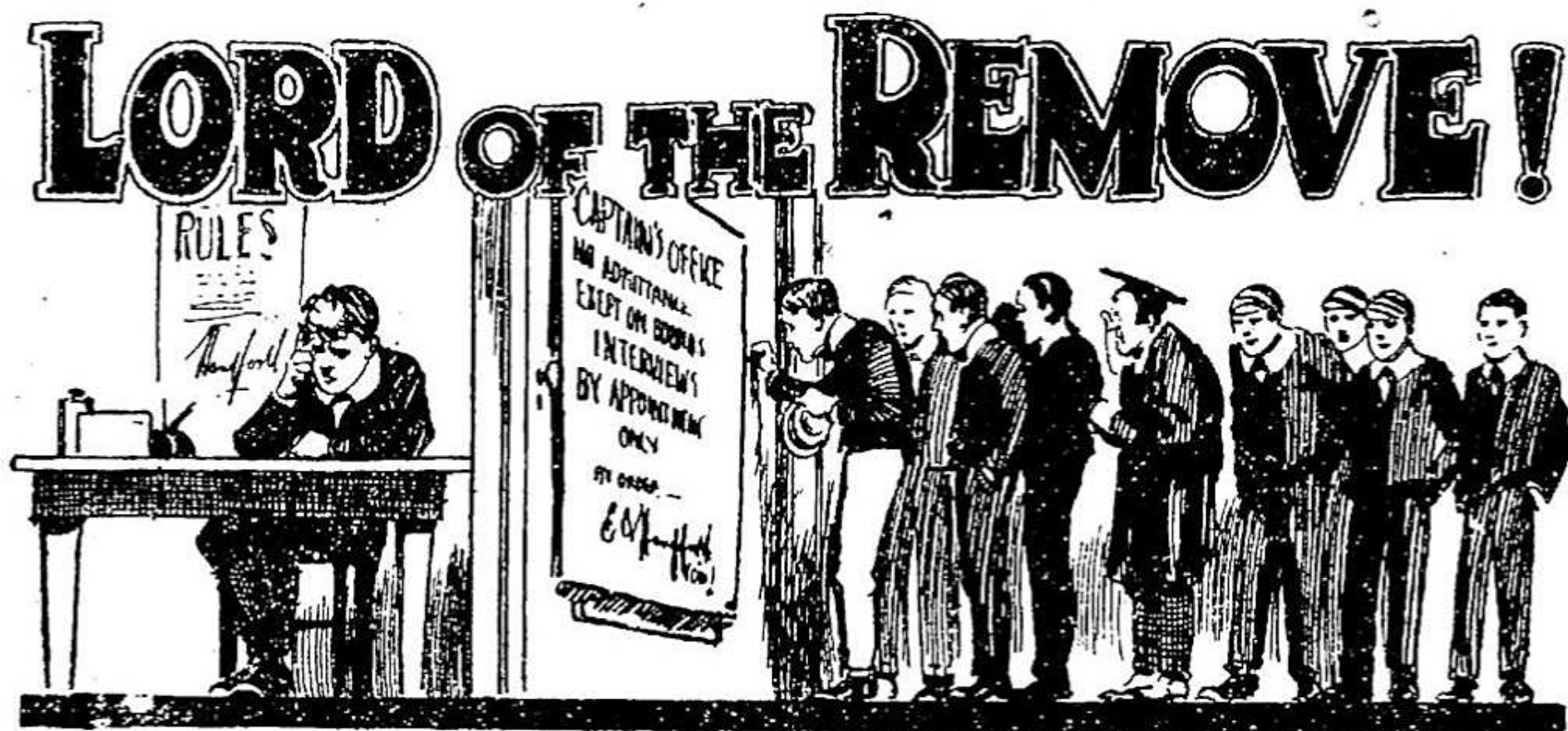


LORD *of the* **REMOVE!**

A Laughable Long Complete Story
of the Famous Boys of St. Frank's.



"Water! Help! Fire!" bellowed Handforth, as he tore frantically down the steps. Handy on fire was something of a novelty, and he was greeted with loud cheers as he made a bee-line for the fountain.



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

Handy, as the new skipper of the Remove, throws his weight about in this laughable long complete yarn of the famous Boys of St. Frank's.

CHAPTER 1.

THE ORDER OF THE BOOT.

ARNOLD McCLURE, of the St. Frank's Remove, looked up and groaned.

"Here he comes!" he said dismally.

"Eh? Who?" said Church, looking up from his book. "Oh, Handy? Bother him! It's Sunday evening, and he can't start any of his rot now. Shove a bit more coal on the fire, Mac, old man!"

Study D, in the Ancient House, was looking very cosy and bright. It was just that hour of Sunday evening when the juniors were at liberty to amuse themselves quietly in their own quarters—and reading was the general habit since, of course, any sort of game was prohibited, and lessons were forgotten.

A cheerful fire was crackling in the grate, and a row of chestnuts were roasting on the top bar. Church and McClure were lounging at their ease, each with a book. It was a picture of perfect contentment.

The door opened. Edward Oswald Handforth strode in—and peace slipped out.

"Oh!" he said, frowning at his chums. "Taking things pretty easily, aren't you?"

"Why not?" asked Church. "Isn't it Sunday evening?"

Handforth walked round the little room, the frown still upon his rugged brow. His pre-

occupation was no sudden phase, for he had been more or less absent-minded throughout the day. He came to a halt at last, and turned his attention upon his chums.

"Yes, you'll have to clear out," he said firmly.

"Who—us?" asked McClure, looking up.

"Yes—you!"

"Clear out?"

"That's what I said," nodded Handforth.

"What for? And when?"

"This evening—now!" replied Edward Oswald resolutely. "Sorry, and all that, but a Form captain can't be bothered with two other fellows in his study. A skipper needs a room entirely to himself. It's only right, too. No Form captain can attend to his duties properly if he's interrupted. So you'll both have to get into other quarters."

Much as Church and McClure desired to continue their reading with an air of indifference, this pronouncement so startled them that they lowered their books as though actuated by a hidden, connected spring.

"Get into other quarters?" repeated Church, staring.

"You're mad!" said McClure.

"I've got it all fixed," said Handforth calmly. "There's over an hour before supper, and you can get busy at once. Take all your

kit and clear out into Study J. Captain's orders!"

"Captain's orders be blowed!" snorted Church indignantly. "Do you think we're going to be messed about and chucked out of our study just because you get a silly, fat-headed whim?"

"Is that the way to talk to your captain?" roared Handforth.

"It's the way to talk to a dotty, swelled-headed chump!" retorted Church. "I'm talking to him, too! You were made skipper last night—by a giddy fluke—and you can't even let Sunday go by without throwing your weight about!"

"And it's like your nerve to give us the order of the boot!" snapped McClure.

Handforth clenched his fists.

"Better go easy!" warned Church. "Sunday evening, remember!"

"You—you tricky rotters!" said Handforth bitterly. "You know I can't chuck you out, and kick up a din, so you're taking advantage of me. Any scrap on a Sunday evening means a gating for the week, at least. But you're going, my lads, all the same!"

"But why?" asked McClure. "What on earth for? I say, Handy, old man, chuck it, you know! Goodness knows, we don't want any squabbling! Be sensible, and give up this imbecile idea."

Edward Oswald Handforth glared.

"I don't want to be nasty," he said coldly. "I don't want us to have any breach, or rift in the flute—"

"Rift in the lute, you mean?"

"I don't want any quibbles from you, Walter Church!" snapped Handforth. "What's the difference between a lute and a flute, anyhow?"

"Not much, I suppose," grinned Church. "Only one's a reed instrument, and the other's got strings, like a guitar—"

"They're both musical instruments, aren't they!" roared Handforth. "Why make a fuss over a string or a reed? I've got nothing against you chaps, as chaps. You're my chums. We're all pally. Good friends, eh?"

"That's the stuff," said Church, nodding.

"Now we can go on reading," said McClure, with relief.

"At the same time, you can't stay in this study," went on Handforth firmly. "A Form captain needs plenty of room—plenty of space. And there's the question of dignity, too. How can a Form captain be dignified if two other fellows share his study? No! He's got to have a room entirely to himself. So you chaps have got to quit!"

Church nodded slowly.

"Perhaps you're right," he admitted. "But what's the good of a tiny room like this for a Form captain? It's too insignificant, Handy! Why don't you let Mac and I stay, and you clear out?"

"Topping!" said McClure. "I should make the small lecture-hall into a study, Handy—it'll just about fit your dignity."

For a moment Handforth looked intent, then he frowned.

"I didn't ask for any of your funny sarcasm," he said gruffly. "This is my study, and this is where I stay! You're both clearing out!"

"But Study J is Jarrow's room!" protested McClure. "He might have something to say—"

"If Jarrow has something to say, I'll deal with him!" interrupted Handforth. "When the Form captain gives orders, those orders have got to be obeyed. Understand? Obeyed—to the letter!"

"Or else death follows?" asked Church tartly.

"Yes! Eh? I mean—" Handforth paused, reddening. "Still trying to be funny, eh?" he went on. "I don't expect much else from you fellows—being my chums, you naturally presume. But now that I'm Form captain, there's going to be no favouritism!"

"Oh, goodness!" groaned McClure. "Form captain! Form captain! Form captain! We've had those giddy words dinned into our ears for twenty-four solid hours! Anybody might think you'd been made Prime Minister, or crowned King of the Remove, or something! A Form captain is only an ordinary chap, after all!"

"A very ordinary chap!" said Church pointedly.

"A Form captain has duties to perform!" said Handforth, with dignity.

"Then why not perform a few, instead of gassing all day?" growled Church, with rising indignation. "The Form allowed you to hold an election—the chaps spoofed you up to the neck—and gave you all the votes. Then Crowell came along and made the election official. You know as well as I do that you're only Form captain by a mere accident! And now the Remove is pretty sick!"

"I don't wonder at it," said McClure. "Look what it's saddled itself with!"

Handforth breathed hard.

"It's no good trying to be kind to you chaps," he said thickly. "Are you clearing out of this study, or shall I use force? I don't want to disturb the peace of Sunday evening, but duty is duty! As skipper, I've got to have this room to myself. That's final! So you can collect all your goods and chattels, and shift into Study J. I'll go along and see Jarrow now, and fix it up."

"If he objects, I suppose you'll sentence him to penal servitude for seven years?" asked Church sourly. "Or cast him down into the deepest dungeon? Who do you think you are, anyhow?"

"I'm Form captain!"

"Not the Grand Vizier, by any chance?" snapped Church.

"Or the Lord High Everything-In-The-World?" asked Mac.

"Go on!" said Handforth. "I don't mind admitting I was a little bit worried about turning you chaps out—but my mind's easy now. I've had nothing but insults for the

last ten minutes, so the sooner you get out of here the better. I don't even recognise you as my chums any more!"

Church shook his head, and turned to McClure.

"By the way," he said deliberately, "Where's old Handy?"

"Eh?" said McClure, staring.

"We haven't seen the old chap for twenty-four hours," said Church. "And I'm blessed if I can understand what's become of him."

"But—but——" said McClure.

"Handy vanished last night—immediately after the election," said Church. "We haven't seen a sign of him since."

Handforth found his voice.

"You silly fathead, I'm here!" he said, in astonishment.

"Eh?" exclaimed Church. "Who's this? Not Handy, I know!"

"Not Handy!" gasped Edward Oswald. "I'm myself, aren't I?"

"Goodness knows who you are!" said Church coldly. "You're a stranger to me, anyhow—a flint-hearted, self-important jackass with a swollen head! Good old Handy hasn't any of those rotten qualities!"

"Hear, hear!" agreed Mac, scenting the drift.

Handforth saw the idea, too.

"Chuck it!" he growled. "I'm sorry, but now that I'm Form captain, I've got to sink my own personality, and devote myself entirely to my duties. A skipper has no time to devote to his chums. He's got to be hard-hearted—he's got to be a worker for the general good. I'll fix things up with Jarrow."

He strode out, and his chums breathed deeply.

"Oh, the madman!" growled Church. "Just because he's skipper, he thinks he's a sort of king! He's only got to give an order, and the whole Remove will fly to obey it! What can we do with the idiot?"

"Obey him!" retorted McClure. "By jingo, we'll take him at his word, too! He doesn't know when he's well off—but he'll know soon enough—after we've gone! We'll take all our things—everything we own. We'll leave him absolutely to himself, and let him potter along until he comes back to us, begging us to return!"

And, feeling much more comfortable, they prepared to leave their old study, with its many binding associations. But they were consoled by the thought that their absence would not be very prolonged!



CHAPTER 2.

JARROW HAS NO OBJECTION.

STUDY J, further along the Remove passage, was practically identical with Study D. But, somehow, there was something lack-

ing. The furniture was quite decent, a nice

fire was burning, and everything was trim. Too trim, perhaps. That homely untidiness of Study D was absent.

Hubert Jarrow was at home. As it happened, he had this study entirely to himself—a fact which was a main cause of Handforth's indignation. A fine state of affairs that he—the Form skipper—should have two other chaps in his study, while Jarrow had a room all to himself! It simply wasn't to be tolerated! Jarrow was not reading. He was sitting at the table, amusing himself by drawing an alleged map of Sussex. A particularly large blot—which had been originally intended as a bird's-eye view of St. Frank's—was the principal object of interest.

"Hallo, Jarrow!" said Handforth, as he came in.

"Hallo, Handy!" acknowledged Jarrow. "Just drawing a map, you know. It's surprising how much amusement a chap can get out of drawing a map. And it's all the more interesting when you draw it from memory. I've got a pretty good memory, on the whole, and I can easily recall all the different roads and rivers. When you come to think of it, the memory is a pretty wonderful thing. Some fellows can't remember what happened even yesterday—and other fellows can remember things that happened ten years ago. It all depends upon——"

"Yes, we know all about that!" interrupted Handforth hastily. "My hat, I'd forgotten you were a chap who can jaw the hind leg off a donkey!"

"A very intelligent animal," said Jarrow, nodding. "Some people believe that donkeys are stupid—but that's all wrong."

"I didn't come here to talk about donkeys!" roared Handforth. "I came here to talk about myself!"

"It amounts to the same thing," replied Jarrow cheerfully. "Now, take the average donkey. What is he? A hard-worked, much-abused animal that always carries on with the job, and makes no fuss about it. I can't bear a fuss. Any kind of fuss upsets me completely. And when I'm upset, I get irritable and peevish——"

"I'm peevish already!" interrupted Handforth impatiently. "I came here to give some orders, not to listen to your rot! Once you get fairly started, there's no stopping you!"

Jarrow looked mildly surprised. He was a very harmless sort of junior, but he had a habit of rambling on from one subject to another, and leading the conversation into all sorts of byways.

"I've come here to talk to you," went on Handforth, before Jarrow could open his mouth again. "You've got this study to yourself, haven't you? Well, from this minute onwards you're the happy possessor of two study-mates."

"Really?" asked Jarrow mildly. "Who are these mates going to be? Of course, one can have all sorts of mates. Children have their playmates, ships have their mates, too. I was on a ship once where the first mate fell ill,

and nearly died of pneumonia. I've always thought that pneumonia is a nasty sort of complaint——"

"Look here——"

"Not that I'm much of a chap for making complaints," said Jarrow, warming to his work. "I don't believe in these fellows who always grumble and growl at everything. Contentment of mind is a much-coveted prize——"

"You—you silly gas-bag——"

"I'm afraid you'll never win any prizes, Handforth," said Jarrow, shaking his head. "You're too impetuous. You're too ram-headed. You're too volcanic. Only the other day I read that volcanoes are always liable to burst into sudden activity—and you look a bit like that now. But take my advice, and don't start any eruptions. One great maxim in life is to remain cool under all circumstances. Never lose your head. He's rather unwell at the moment, I believe—the Head, I mean. Caught a touch of rheumatism, I heard. I'm rather sorry for the old boy, because he's——"

"Will you dry up?" roared Handforth fiercely. "Will you be quiet?"

"Quietness is an essential factor on Sunday evenings," agreed Jarrow. "There's always something peaceful and charming about Sunday evening. Picture the villagers wending their way homewards from church, walking along the lanes and footpaths. It's perfectly disgraceful about Farmer Holt's footpath!" he went on indignantly. "Think of it! A man who doesn't care a jot for the comfort of his fellow-beings——"

"By George! You—you wound-up gramophone——"

"A man who doesn't mind what inconvenience he puts people to," went on Jarrow angrily. "That footpath of his cuts off a mile, and out of sheer perversity, he closes it to the public. And the law upholds him! What is the law, anyhow? A lot of red-tape and officious interference. If there's one thing I can't stand, it's interference!"

Handforth completely missed the point.

"I can't stick people who come butting their noses into the affairs of others," continued Jarrow curtly. "There's no justification for being a nosy Parker or a peeping Tom! Anybody who forces his way upon another chap is nothing more nor less than a public nuisance. He's got to be dealt with firmly. The best thing to use is an iron rod——"

"Hi!" howled Handforth. "Stop!"

"Good gracious! What's the matter?" asked Jarrow, starting.

"Are you going to stop, or shall I gag you?" panted Handforth desperately. "My only hat! Of all the jabbering, chattering monkeys——"

"I hope you're not referring to me?" asked Jarrow coldly.

"Then you can keep on hoping—because I am!" snapped Handforth. "I've come here to tell you that Church and McClure are sharing your study from now onwards. Understand? No, don't answer! I don't want to stop here for the rest of the evening! Church and McClure are coming almost at once, and you needn't raise any objections, because I've given my orders. Captain's orders!"

"Yes, but——"

"It's my turn to do the talking now," interrupted Handforth curtly. "Make some room on those shelves, and clear out some of the drawers. They'll be here within five minutes!"

He escaped before Jarrow could get going again, and he met Church and McClure in the passage, both laden with books and other personal property.

"Good men!" said Handforth approvingly. "I like to see this ready obedience. It'll pay in the long run—you'll be glad of this attention to duty later on. Everybody who pleases me will get special marks!"

"I thought there was to be no favouritism," said Church.

"There won't be," retorted Handforth curtly. "But those fellows who show the correct spirit of loyalty to their captain will be given the most responsible posts."

"Posts?" said McClure. "Who do you think you are? The head of an army, about to distribute staff appointments? There's only one official post in a Form—and that's the skipper. And even his duties are only nominal——"

"We don't want any arguments!" interrupted Handforth. "Take those things along, and then come back for the next load. Study D has got to be cleared in readiness for to-morrow morning."

"Zero hour?" said Church.

"Eh?"

"To-morrow morning—when you declare war."

"Yes!" said Handforth promptly. "War on all fatheads who try to be funny! A Form captain has to be strict and impartial, or he can never rule with the necessary authority."

The door of Study E opened, and Archie Glenthorne looked out.

"I mean to say, all this dashed prattle!" he complained. "Sunday evening, and all that sort of stuff. A chappie simply can't obtain forty of the best and brightest without sundry interruptions—— What-ho! Good gad! Moving, what?"

He adjusted his monocle, and gazed at Church and McClure disappearing into Study J.

"Yes," said Handforth. "Now that I'm captain I've got to have a room to myself."

"Oh, absolutely!" agreed Archie. "I mean, the dear old scouts have escaped at last, what?"

"Escaped?"

"Well, I mean, life is full of these little compensations," said Archie. "Until now Church and McClure haven't had any valid excuse, if you know what I mean. I can just imagine the dear old boys shaking the glad hand in silent relief, and so forth. I mean to say, a sort of release from bondage, what? Off with the good old shackles. Freed from the clanking chains, by gad!"

"You're dotty!" said Handforth, staring. "What's all this rot about clanking chains and freedom? Church and McClure are clearing out of Study D because I've given them their orders. I'm Form captain now."

"Really?" asked Archie mildly. "I've heard a rumour——"

"This is no rumour!" snapped Edward Oswald. "And you needn't try to be sarcastic, either. We held the election last night, and I was at the top of the poll."

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "In fact, that's where you've always been, old fruity one!"

"Eh? Always been where?"

"Up at the top of the frightful old pole!" said Archie.

"You—you howling idiot!" said Handforth, turning red. "Have you got the nerve to stand there, and say that your Form captain is up the pole?"

"But, odds contradictions and denials, you just said it yourself!"

"Said what?"

"That you were up the dashed pole!"

"I didn't!" roared Handforth. "I said I was at the top of the poll. The poll, you chump—not the pole!"

"Oh, rather!" said Archie. "One of those dashed cases where there's a distinction without any difference, what? P-o-l-l spells pole, and p-o-l-e spells pole, what? In that case, you're up twice, laddie!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A few juniors had collected, and a quiet murmur of laughter went up—no loud outbursts being permitted on Sunday evening. Handforth glared round.

"A fine way to treat your new skipper!" he said bitterly. "But I haven't started on you yet! Wait until to-morrow morning, my lads! You'll wake up with a jerk—and you'll find out who's boss!"

He strode off to Study D, highly indignant. And ten minutes later that celebrated apart-

ment was looking rather bare and chill. Church and McClure had removed all their property, and had tidied up scrupulously. But as the study was no longer theirs, they hadn't troubled to make up the fire. The room looked cheerless and unfamiliar. The friendly litter was gone. Handforth stared round, frowning.

"H'm! Looks a bit different," he muttered. "I suppose it was the right thing to turn those fatheads out. What's the good of being a skipper unless you make some alterations? Still, it's a bit lonely—— No!" he added firmly. "I've got to be strong—I've got to be as firm as a rock!"

He sat down at the table, and pondered over his forthcoming campaign. This was his chance! He had always longed to be Form captain—and now that he was accidentally pitchforked into that coveted position, he had no intention of neglecting his golden opportunity.

Church and McClure, in the meantime, settled themselves down in Study J with perfect contentment. Jarrow was an amiable fellow, and he raised no objections. In fact, he was rather pleased to acquire two such patient study-mates. He felt that they would make good listeners.

And Jarrow's idle ramblings, after the aggressive voice of Edward Oswald Handforth, was to Church and McClure like a soothing balm.

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FREE!*

..... Full particulars on Page 41



CHAPTER 3.

HANDFORTH ON THE JOB!

TUBBS, the Ancient House page-boy, softly opened the dormitory door and peeped inside. The school clock was just chiming out sixty-three, and Tubbs was only half awake—having turned out, in fact, barely ten minutes earlier.

"Lummy!" he muttered. "It seems a shame to do it!"

He crept into the dormitory, looked at the sleeping forms of Handforth & Co., and then glanced out of the window. By no stretch of the imagination could the autumn morning be called a cheerful one. The sky was so heavily overcast that full daylight had not yet come, half a gale was whistling round the school buildings, and an intermittent rain was rattling against the windows.

Tubbs yawned, and shook his head

"Still, orders is orders, and Master Handforth might git wild if I don't obey 'em," he told himself. "I s'pose I'd better do it!"

He went to Edward Oswald's bed, seized the Remove skipper by the shoulders, and shook him. Handforth, who was lying flat on his back with his mouth open, gave a grunt, and lunged upwards and outwards with his right. Tubbs caught a terrific swipe on the side of his head.

"Crikey!" he gasped, staggering away.

"Refusing to obey orders, eh?" mumbled Handforth fiercely. "All right—take that! I'll show you whether I'm to be defied or not!"

"Crikey!" said Tubbs.

It was obvious that sheer disaster would follow unless he carried out his instructions. For Handforth was sloshing people in his dreams, even.

"Wake up, Master Handforth!" said Tubbs, reaching forward and grabbing the pillow. "It's 'alf-past six. You told me to lug you out, even if I 'ad to empty the water-jug over you."

Handforth drowsily opened his eyes, and groped for the missing pillow. Then he caught sight of Tubbs, sat up, and glared.

"Gimme that pillow, you young fathead!" he said thickly.

"Time to git up, Master Handforth——"

"Rats! Gimme that pillow!"

"Your orders, sir, was to git you out at all costs——"

"Are you going to give me that pillow, or shall I smash you?" roared Handforth, leaping out of bed. "Of all the confounded nerve! Barging into my bed-room, and pinching——"

"But you told me——"

Tubbs broke off with a wild howl, for Handforth, without compunction, had delivered a fearful punch on the chest which knocked the page-boy over in a heap. He struck the floor with a thud, and Handforth climbed back into bed.

"Now you can clear off!" he said grimly.

"Oh, crumbs!" groaned Tubbs, struggling to his feet. "It ain't no good messin' about, Master Handforth. I forgives you freely for knockin' me down, because you ain't rightly awake. But you've got to git up. Them's your own orders, sir, an' I ain't leavin' this room until you're hup!"

He approached the bed warily. Handforth had snuggled down, still heavy with sleep, and totally forgetful of the orders he had given overnight. Tubbs hesitated. Under the circumstances, he would be justified, perhaps, in abandoning this perilous business.

But Tubbs was a youth of stubborn purpose.

"Orders," he muttered, "is orders. Besides, Master 'Andforth promised me a bob if I got 'im out. And a bob's a bob, after all's said an' done!"

He looked round, spotted a large sponge, and set his jaw. He crossed the room, filled the sponge with water, and went back to Handforth's bed. With one lightning movement, he yanked the bedclothes back, slopped

the sponge with a fearful squelch into Handforth's face, and made a lightning dive for the door.

"Gug-gug—— What the—— Oooooooh!"

Handforth sat up, shivering. He gave a gasp of sheer horror. The neck of his pyjamas was open, and the sponge had suddenly slipped down. An expression of dazed dread came over him as the sponge slithered icily down his chest.

"Help!" he gasped wildly. "What the—— Oooooooh!"

In making a wild grab at his chest, he had emptied the sponge, and he leapt out of bed with such speed that the floor seemed to rock.

"Who—who did this?" he asked ominously.

"I did, sir," said Tubbs, trembling.

"You!"

"Yessir!"

"Why, of all the confounded pieces of nerve——"

"Your orders, Master Handforth!"

"My orders?"

"Yessir!"

Handforth gave a gulp, and dimly remembered.

"By George!" he panted. "I do seem to recollect. But I didn't tell you to drown me, you lunatic!"

"It's gorn 'alf-past six, sir," said Tubbs, with one foot out in the corridor. "I shock you up, sir, an' pinched your pillow, but it wasn't no good. Sorry if you're wet, Master 'Andforth. But orders is orders."

Handforth was so wide awake now that he had full grasp of the situation. And his expression changed. It pleased him to think that Tubbs had obeyed him so implicitly. He tossed the sponge aside, and grinned.

"Good man!" he said approvingly. "That's what I like to see—obedience to instructions. You'll get half-a-crown for this, Tubby, as soon as I get down. Always obey orders, and you'll be all right!"

"Yessir!" said Tubbs, with relief.

He vanished, and Handforth's attention was attracted by a series of watery gurgles on his immediate flank. He glanced round, and found that he had carelessly flung the sponge into McClure's face. And McClure was in the process of waking up as he breathed through the wet mass.

"Topping!" said Handforth cheerfully.

He gave the sponge a squeeze, and expelled the rest of the water.

"Ouch!" gasped McClure, sitting up. "Hi! You—you dangerous maniac! I'm drenched! What's the idea of——"

"Time to get up!" interrupted Handforth curtly.

McClure stared dizzily at the wet morning.

"It's pouring with rain!" he snapped. "Besides, it's hardly light yet! The rising-bell hasn't gone——"

"It's half-past six—and we've got to be on Little Side by seven," put in Handforth. "Practice. I'm captain now, and there's going to be no slacking. Practice every morn-



"Orders is orlers!" muttered Tubbs as, with one swift movement, he yanked the bedclothes back and squelched the well-watered sponge into the slumbering Handforth's face. "Gug-gug— What the— Ooooooooooh!" gurgled the skipper of the Remove.

ing from seven until eight. That's the new order."

McClure goggled.

"But—but we can't practise in the pouring rain!" he protested.

"Why not?"

"Why not? Because— Well, dash it, it's not done!" said McClure crossly. "People don't go out in a downpour, and practise football. Get back to bed, you chump, and wait until rising-bell."

"I'm not going to allow the weather to interfere with my prearranged plans!" said Handforth, staring out of the window. "A confounded nerve—that's what it is. Disgusting!"

He spoke as though the elements had offered him a deadly insult by sending this rain on the very first morning of his captaincy. It certainly was a bit thick. The elements couldn't have known whom they were offending.

Much as McClure disliked it, he was forced to turn out. And Church, being a member of the team also, was ruthlessly tipped out of bed, and ordered to dress. He would have been tipped out, just the same, whether he was a member of the team or not. Handforth was quite impartial in these little matters. However, after they were all dressed, they felt better. It is always the first minute or two that feels the worst.

"A fat lot of good us going out to practise on our own!" said Church gloomily. "It

would be a different thing if the whole team was turning out—"

"The whole team is turning out," interrupted Handforth calmly.

"Why, have you arranged it?"

"I'm going to arrange it—now!" retorted Edward Oswald, a grim, sinister note creeping into his voice. "We'll take Tregellis-West and Watson first. You go round to the dormitories, and give the fellows a preliminary tip. If they're not getting up when I arrive, they'll know something!"

The next half-hour in the Remove section of the Ancient House was hectic. Wild, animal cries proceeded from dormitory after dormitory. Fellows appeared with tangled hair and puffy noses. Thick ears were general. A kind of tornado had passed through the Remove sleeping quarters—and, incidentally, the tornado had now swept out, and was converging upon the West House, to deal with that section of the Remove. The echoes of the gathering storm could just be heard.

When Edward Oswald Handforth made up his mind to a certain course, he went straight on with it irrespective of rebuffs and setbacks. Thus it came about that all the footballers of the Remove were on Little Side by seven-fifteen; the rain had been kind enough to ease off considerably by that time. True, Handforth was of very little use, being exhausted. His knuckles, too, were painful and swollen, and his features were more than usually rugged.

But he was triumphant. He had gained his end. Not that the rest of the team had tamely knuckled under. Had they chosen, they could have defied Handforth and utterly ignored him. But it saved an enormous amount of trouble to pander to his whims. He had an unfortunate habit of using his right with devastating effect, and the only way of checking him was to humour his mood. As Reggie Pitt remarked, life was very short, and footer practice, after all, was a worthy object.

"It's all very well for fellows like us," he said, as he chatted with Fullwood and Jack Grey and De Valerie. "Handy can't very well wipe us up if we disobey his orders. But he can wipe up lots of the others."

"He's been doing it for half an hour!" said Fullwood indignantly.

"That's why we've got to adopt a pacifist mood," replied Reggie, nodding. "For the sake of the weaker ones, we've got to humour the ass. But how's it going to all end?"

"Goodness knows!" said Jack Grey. "Mr. Crowell has forbidden us to hold another election until Dick Hamilton comes back, so we're saddled with this prizefighter until then! He'll create a revolution before he's done!"

"You ought to be skipper," said De Valerie, looking at Pitt.

"Rats!" grinned Reggie. "Handy's the captain, and it's our duty to support him."

"What?"

"Fact!" said Reggie.

"But you don't mean that we've got to accept him seriously?"

"There'll be a pile of unnecessary trouble if we don't," replied Pitt. "Besides, it's only fair. Give the man a chance! Handy's one of the best in the world—a bit too hot-headed, and a bit too aggressive—but, still, he's one of the best in the world. Let's give him a free hand, to show what he can do."

"H'm!" mused Fullwood. "There's something in it. One way and another, we ought to get quite a lot of fun out of Handy's captaincy, too."

"Exactly!" nodded Reggie. "Give him a free hand—and if we don't get a good few laughs, my name isn't first cousin to a coalmine!"

CHAPTER 4.

HANDFORTH OUTLINES HIS POLICY.



DICK HAMILTON, the real captain of the Remove, was away.

That, in a nutshell, was the reason for Edward

Oswald Handforth's present feverish activity. The Remove had amused themselves by electing him as a joke—and Mr. Crowell had amused himself by telling the Remove that the election was valid. This had been on the previous Saturday evening, and the Remove was just recovering.

For Handforth, as a skipper, was an unknown quantity. But not completely unknown. The most unimaginative fellow in the Form knew, at least, one thing: Trouble—with a capital T—was an absolute certainty!

Dick Hamilton wasn't the only absentee. Mr. Nelson Lee, the Housemaster of the Ancient House, was also away. In fact, they were both engaged upon an important investigation, and there were rumours already floating about that they wouldn't return for some weeks.

And Handforth was the official skipper in the meantime!

So the Remove's dismay was not without cause. Quite a number of fellows expected to get some fun out of the affair—but others were not quite so optimistic. Forrest & Co., for example, had the wind up. They were young gentlemen of questionable habits, and they had a lurking fear that Handforth would officiously pay them marked attention now that he was in a position of power.

By breakfast-time that morning, the Remove was somewhat exhausted. Not only the footballers, but all the other members of the Form, had had it firmly impressed upon them that Edward Oswald Handforth was the captain, that he was to be obeyed, and that if he wasn't obeyed, there would be loads of trouble.

A few dare-devils had utterly refused to acknowledge Handforth's authority, and they were dare-devils no longer. Their time was fully occupied in nursing their bruises.

Handforth wasn't a bully. He never took advantage of a weaker fellow. But when anybody defied him, his methods were crisp and businesslike. They generally had about ten seconds to put up their hands—and ten minutes to recover, after they had failed to put up their hands. His methods with the weaklings were equally drastic. He calmly yanked them off their feet, placed them across his knee, and spanked them. It wasn't even necessary to inflict any physical pain. The humiliation was quite enough to guarantee obedience thereafter.

Indeed, Handforth's methods were so swift that by breakfast-time the Remove was in a state of feverish uncertainty. The "heads" of the Form—fellows like Pitt and Fullwood and Tommy Watson—had nothing to fear from the cyclonic skipper. They were highly amused by the whole affair. But the others, the rank and file, were rapidly becoming rebellious.

And Handforth was fairly in his glory.

The hefty ones he challenged to instant combat, and dared them to question his authority. They didn't question it for long.

Of course, Handforth's idea of his authority, and the Remove's idea of his authority, were two totally different things. The captaincy had got into Edward Oswald's blood, and he seemed to imagine that he was not only a Form captain, but a Housemaster and a headmaster and an Inquisitor all rolled

into one. He let the Remove plainly see that he was a Power, a Law, a Dictator.

The Remove, quite naturally, regarded their captain as just one of themselves—a fellow who only differed from them in the sense that he was in a position to call meetings, select footer teams, and so forth. Such mild methods were bordering on the ludicrous to a fire-eater of Handforth's type.

"You'd better understand, once and for all, that I'm in charge!" said Handforth, as he addressed a group of Removites from the Ancient House steps. "I don't want to be nasty—peace is my motto—but if any fathead wants a scrap, he can have one!"

The fatheads declined the offer.

"You've only got to question my full authority, and you can have as many rounds as you like—with or without the gloves," went on Handforth calmly. "Now that I'm skipper, I mean to make all sorts of drastic alterations. There's been too much laxity. There's been too much go-as-you-please stuff in the past. From now onwards, the Remove is going to win a name for itself. I'm going to lead it to glory after glory."

"You're more likely to come a fearful cropper!" said somebody.

"Who said that?" roared Handforth, glaring.

"I did!" snapped Doyle, of the West House.

"Oh, did you?"

"Yes, I did!"

"Then you'd better understand, Harold Doyle, that you'll come a cropper before I shall!" snorted Handforth, striding down the steps, and pushing his way through the crowd. "I can't allow my dignity to be slighted by an ass like you! Are you going to put 'em up, or shall I biff you?"

Doyle was quite as big as Handforth, and he was well known for his hasty temper. He glared.

"Biff me—if you can!" he retorted hotly.

"Nothing gasier!" said Handforth.

Crash!

He swept Doyle's guard aside with contemptuous ease, and landed one of his special drives on Doyle's nose. Doyle sat down in the wet gravel with a squelch.

"And that's the way I'm going to treat everybody who talks out of the back of their necks!" said Handforth, looking round. "Does somebody else want to have a shot? Mind you, I'm not quarrelsome—I want everybody to understand that I'm wholeheartedly for the Remove. Trust me, and you'll have more japes this term than you've ever had before—more victories than you can dream of."

"Good old Handy!" grinned Reggie Pitt. "Let 'em know who you are!"

"I'm going into my office now—and I don't want to be disturbed," said Handforth curtly.

"Your office?"

"My office!"

"I didn't know you had an office!" said Pitt

"Study D really," explained Handforth. "My headquarters, you know. I maintain that a Form captain ought to have a proper office—ail to himself. I'm going to draft out my plans for the day. If any idiot comes and disturbs me, he'll regret it!"

"Supposing a sensible chap comes?" asked Fullwood, grinning.

"That's impossible!" retorted Handforth. "Any chap who comes to Study D during the next half-hour won't be sensible!"

He turned on his heel and strode into the Ancient House.

"I'm dashed if the captaincy isn't acting like a tonic on him," chuckled Pitt. "He's getting smart in his old age! Shall we go along in about five minutes and beard the lion in his den?"

"'Safety first' is my motto," said Fullwood, shaking his head. "I'm ready for a scrap any old time—but why wave a red flag to a bull?"



CHAPTER 5.

BY APPOINTMENT ONLY!

OOD gad!"

Archie Glenthorne, strolling along the Remove passage, came to a halt, and screwed his monocle firmly into his eye. He stood there, elegant and immaculate, an expression of mild astonishment on his aristocratic features.

"Good gad!" he repeated, staring.

He was just opposite Study D, and his attention had been attracted by a large square of cardboard which was pinned to the upper panels. And the card bore the following legend:

"CAPTAIN'S OFFICE."

And immediately below this inscription, which was in huge letters, ran three further lines in small characters:

"STRICTLY PRIVATE.

No Admittance Except On Business.

INTERVIEWS BY APPOINTMENT ONLY.

By Order, Ed. O. HANDFORTH (Capt.)."

"Good gad!" said Archie for the third time.

"What are you gadding about, old man?" asked Alf Brent as he joined his study chum.

"Hallo! My hat! What's all this?"

"Absolutely," said Archie. "Just, as a matter of fact, what I was going to say. You absolutely took the jolly old words out of the vocal department. What, I mean, as it were, is it?"

"The silly fathead!" breathed Brent. "He seems to think he's the King of St. Frank's, or something. By appointment only, by Jingo! That's a bit thick, isn't it?"

"Thick?" said Archie. "I mean, what? It strikes me, laddie, as being dashed mottled, not to say hovering near the edge! Lurid times in the offing, what?"

"Oh, I expect he'll get over it in a day or two," said Alf.

They passed along to the lobby, and found Church and McClure chatting with the Onions brothers, who had just come over from the West House with a cast-iron rumour.

"According to all I've heard, it's an absolute fact," said Johnny Onions.

"Well, I shan't be sorry," growled Church. "A new Housemaster will probably keep Handy in check, and stop a lot of his tommy rot!"

"New Housemaster?" asked Brent.

"Not absolutely really?" observed Archie. "I mean, I thought the jolly old lad from across the way was going to do the good old honours until Mr. Lee staggered back to the old pile?"

"That's what I thought," said Johnny Onions. "But it seems that the work will be too heavy for Mr. Stokes. After all, two Houses on the hands of one man is a bit stiff. And Mr. Lee might not come back for three or four weeks. The new man is only a temporary Housemaster, of course."

"But is this official?" asked Alf Brent.

"Well, I didn't hear it from Mr. Stokes, if that's what you mean?" smiled Johnny. "As a matter of fact, Bertie got it from somebody in the Fifth. But, naturally, it's only a rumour as yet."

A shadow appeared in the doorway.

"Rumours again!" said a cheery voice. "You're just as bad at St. Frank's as we are at the River House. What's the new one?"

Hal Brewster, the genial leader of the "Commoners" of the River House School, had left his bicycle at the foot of the steps, and now strode into the lobby. He shed his mackintosh and shook hands.

"Filthy morning!" he observed. "So you've got a new Housemaster coming, eh? Just to take Mr. Lee's place for the time being, I suppose?"

"That's it," said Church, nodding. "We can do with him, too! I only hope it turns out to be really true. We haven't got a Housemaster at present, and Mr. Stokes hardly ever comes across from the West House. And Handy is throwing his weight about without anybody to check him."

"We're in the midst of troublous times!" said Reggie Pitt as he joined the group. "Cheerio, Hal! What brings you out on this wild and tempestuous morning?"

"Wild and tempestuous is right!" said McClure. "It's just as wild and just as tempestuous indoors as it is out! Thank goodness Handy has locked himself in his study until first lesson!"

"What's the matter with him?" asked Brewster, staring.

"Haven't you heard?" asked Pitt sadly.

"Heard what?"

"About old Handforth."

"I say, not ill?" asked Hal with concern.

"Poor old chap! He's a bit of a chump, but, by Jove, he's made of the right stuff! I'm frightfully sorry to hear that he's ill——"

"He's not ill!" growled Church. "Don't jump to conclusions. It's the Remove that's ill! Handy's our skipper!"

"Your what?" asked the River House boy.

"Our new Form captain!"

"Rot!" growled Brewster.

"It's a fact——"

"Rot!" said Brewster. "Rot, rats and piffle! You can't spoof me up with a dotty yarn like that! A skipper has to be elected by the Form—and unless the Remove is about four times as mad as I believed it to be, it would never elect a ram-headed beggar like Handforth!"

Pitt sighed and shook his head.

"Ah, but you don't know the inner history of the tragedy," he said. "Believe it, or believe it not, but our esteemed Form-master, Mr. Crowell, has deliberately and maliciously put it across us. With fiendish design aforesaid, this misguided gentleman has done the dirty on us!"

Hal Brewster stared.

"But, hang it, I don't understand!" he said. "You're not telling me that Mr. Crowell has appointed Handy skipper without the Form's consent?"

They told him the tragic details, but, somehow, Brewster appeared to think them very comic, and he fairly howled.

"Well, it serves you right," he said callously. "Fancy voting for the chump, and electing him by an overwhelming majority. My only hat! That was a fine jape, and no mistake!"

"No mistake!" growled Church. "I think it was all mistake!"

"And you needn't look so jolly chirpy, either," warned Pitt. "I'm not supposed to give you the tip, but Handforth is planning to wipe you River House chaps off the face of the earth. He's making out a list of slaughters he's going to perpetrate, and you River House chaps are on the top line!"

"Oh, are we?" said Brewster tartly.

"Absolutely at the beginning of the list," nodded Pitt. "Handy thinks that a Form captain ought to urge his Form to declare war on every rival body within a radius of twenty miles. Between you and me and the doormat, you're on the eve of a spell of dirty weather. In plain, blunt, homely words, the Remove is about to knock spots off the River House."

Hal Brewster was a cheerful soul, and he grinned.

"Well, I won't start any arguments now—I might get pitched out on my neck," he said calmly. "Well see about that jape business later on. I came here to have a word with you fellows about Wednesday's game."

"No good having a word with us," said Fullwood. "We're nothing. We're ciphers. We're not even units. Handy's the big cheese."

"Then I'll see Handy," said Brewster.

"I'm not particular. I just want to have a word about the fixture——"

"It's quite likely that it isn't a fixture now," interrupted Pitt. "Handy's messing up the whole list, by what I can hear. It didn't suit his august taste, so he's rearranging some of the dates. And don't be surprised if he plays in the forward line, or something terrible like that."

"Well, I'll go along and see him," said Brewster.

"That's your affair," remarked Church carelessly. "But, according to all the latest bulletins, any fellow who puts his nose inside Study D will get it nicely enlarged, free of all cost."

"What on earth——" began Brewster.

"An absolute fact!" agreed Brent. "Interviews by appointment only! No admittance except on business! You can go and read it on his door!"

"But this is business!" argued Brewster, staring. "I say, what rot!"

"Of course it's rot!" said Church. "We wouldn't dream of disagreeing with you, old man. But it's no good telling us it's rot—Handy's the chap you've got to talk to. His ideas of rot are weird and uncanny. Anyhow, if you get your interview, you'll be a mixture of Maskelyne, Devant, and Hercules!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Brewster looked very suspicious.

"You fatheads, this is only a rag!" he growled. "You can't kid me with this piffle! Who ever heard of a captain refusing to see the skipper of another school about an important fixture? Why, it's potty!"

"My dear old soul, pray stagger along and try the good old luck," said Archie invitingly. "I mean to say, a chappie never knows what a chappie can do. Edge in, and see what Santa Claus has for you. We'll stand round in goodly masses, and rescue the remains as they whizz forth!"

"There's nothing like being cheerful," said Brewster pointedly.

"Well, dash it, we don't want to send you to the slaughter without a fair warning," said Pitt. "Handy's the head cook and bottle-washer from now on, and I can tell you that he's been giving us a roasting! You can't do better than try your luck."

"Yes, go and cook the sea," nodded Bertie Onions.

"Go and do what?"

"Sorry!" said Bertie. "I should have said, go and see the cook. Just one of my little slips, you know. I'm often getting puddled and muzzled like that."

"My hat!" ejaculated Brewster. "You're often getting what?"

"Another slip," sighed Bertie. "I meant to say muddled and puzzled!"

"You need muzzling all right!" said Hal tartly.

"I can't help it, you know," said Bertie, shaking his head. "Ask Johnny. Everything I say has a peculiar habit of getting mixed.

Sorry. It's a blushing crow to Johnny, sore old pole, but he's used to it."

"A blushing crow!" repeated Hal, staring.

"I mean to say, a crushing blow, of course."

"But you called your brother a sore old pole!"

"That's just his way of sympathising with me as a poor old soul!" grinned Johnny.

Hal Brewster backed away, and took a deep breath.

"Give me Handforth every time!" he said grimly. "You can take this freak, and pop him in a druddle—— Help! I'm catching the disease myself! Where's Handy? He'll be a relief after a dose of Ertie Bunions!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hal Brewster stalked off, fuming. And the Removites cackled loudly.



CHAPTER 6.

NOTHING DOING!

HAL BREWSTER turned the door handle of Study D and strode in. At least, that is what he meant to do. But the door was locked, and he came up with a thud against the panel, his nose flattening itself painfully.

"Ouch!" he said, reeling away.

He recovered rapidly, and thumped vigorously upon the door.

"Hi!" he roared. "What's the idea of locking yourself in? Open this door, Handy! I want to speak to you!"

"Who's that?" came Handforth's stern voice.

"Me, of course!"

"What name?"

"You ass, don't you know my voice?" snapped Hal. "I'm Brewster, of the River House. I've come over especially to have a jaw about Wednesday's game, and I've got to hustle, too——"

"Sorry—can't see you now!" came Handforth's edict.

"What?"

"Can't see anybody without an appointment!"

"Cheese it, Handy!" growled Brewster. "I can take a joke as well as anybody, but this is getting a bit stale. Open this door, and don't be so jolly funny!"

A cold silence resulted.

"Handy!" yelled Brewster, exasperated.

A still colder silence.

"You—you dithering lunatic!" hooted Hal. "Are you going to open this door or not? You're a fine kind of captain, aren't you, when you won't discuss an important fixture——"

Thump-thump-thump!

He interrupted himself by hammering hard on the panels.

"Are you going to open this——"

"Good gracious me! What is all this noise?" said Mr. Crowell, suddenly appear-

ing on the scene. "Really, young man, I must protest against this unwarrantable disturbance!"

"Sorry, sir!" growled Brewster. "I'm trying to speak to Handforth."

"You're a River House boy, I believe?" said the Form-master sternly. "I have no wish to speak severely to a visitor, but I hope you will moderate your conduct when you honour us again, my boy. I take it that Handforth refuses to unlock his door?"

"Yes, sir, the ass!"

"Ahem! I am inclined to agree— Upon my word!" said Mr. Crowell, adjusting his glasses and gazing at the legend on the door. "What on earth is this? 'No admittance except on business?' 'Interviews by appointment—' Well, good gracious! I have never heard of such a thing!"

"Neither have I, sir!" said Brewster indignantly. "I come all the way from the River House to discuss a football fixture with the Junior captain, and this is what I find! I mean, sir, isn't it a bit steep?"

Mr. Crowell rapped peremptorily upon the door.

"Go away!" came Handforth's roar.

"Dear me!" murmured Mr. Crowell, startled.

"You're wanted, Handy!" called Brewster.

"Rats!" snapped Handforth, from behind the door. "If anybody wants me, they'll have to want! Tell him, whoever it is, to go and eat coke! Tell him to go and boil his ugly face!"

Brewster turned to Mr. Crowell gravely.

"I've got to tell you all that, sir," he said, with a twinkle in his eye.

"It is quite unnecessary for you to repeat that insulting message, young man!" said Mr. Crowell, compressing his lips. "Handforth!" he added, raising his voice. "Handforth! Open this door at once!"

"Clear off! I mean— Eh? Who's that?"

"It is I, Handforth—Mr. Crowell!"

"Oh, crumbs!" came a dismayed gasp. "Half a jiffy, sir!"

The door opened, and Handforth stood there, looking somewhat awkward. He had a pen over one ear, his fingers were inky, and he was in his shirt-sleeves. Up and down the corridor, groups of juniors were edging nearer, highly entertained by the comedy.

"Now, Handforth, what is the meaning of all this farcical nonsense?" demanded Mr. Crowell.

"Farcical nonsense, sir?"

"Yes, Handforth—farcical nonsense!"

"Farcical nonsense, sir?"

"Don't keep repeating my words like a parrot!" snapped the Form-master angrily. "Have you got no sense, Handforth?"

"No, sir—I mean, yes, sir!" said Handforth hastily.

"I am inclined to think you were right in your first answer!" exclaimed Mr. Crowell.

"It is partly my doing that you are in your

present position as Form captain, and it is disconcerting, to say the least, to find that you repay my—my generosity by inviting me to fry my ugly face!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The audience tittered convulsively.

"Well, sir?" said Mr. Crowell, glaring at Handforth.

"I didn't say that, sir!" said the Form captain stoutly.

"I distinctly heard you tell this boy—"

"I didn't say that he could tell you to fry your face, sir," denied Handforth. "I said he could tell you to boil your face, sir!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Crowell turned very red.

"You are only making things much worse, Handforth, by this ridiculous quibbling!" he snapped. "I have never been so insulted—"

"Oh, cheese it, sir!" interrupted Handforth earnestly. "I'd no idea it was you, sir—I thought Brewster meant that one of the chaps wanted to see me. I wouldn't dream of telling you to boil your face, sir!"

"I should hope not, Handforth!" retorted Mr. Crowell. "I should most decidedly hope not! While disapproving of these coarse expressions, I will overlook the offence for this once. If you had been any other boy, however, I should have punished you severely. One must make allowances for—for—"

"The half-witted, sir?" asked Brewster blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is no need to harp upon the point, Brewster!" said Mr. Crowell curtly. "Handforth has been elected to this position of authority, and he shall at least have an opportunity of proving his worth. Let me hear no more of this disturbance. Once and for all, I insist upon order. I object to these hammerings and thumpings in the corridors."

He walked off, feeling that his dignity was liable to suffer if he remained. Handforth prepared to close his study door, but Brewster deftly put his foot inside.

"Hold on!" he said angrily. "Don't be mad, Handy! You can't expect me to discuss footer through a closed door, I suppose?"

"We're not going to discuss footer!" retorted Handforth.

"But I came here—"

"I can't help your troubles, old man!"

"Troubles!" roared Brewster. "There are one or two points I want to settle—and I shan't have a chance to come here again before Wednesday—"

"That's your funeral!" interrupted Handforth coldly. "If you want an interview with me about the footer, you've got to fix it up by appointment. A Form captain can't waste his time on promiscuous callers. Make an appointment by 'phone, or by letter, or with one of my secretaries—"

"Secretaries!" gasped Brewster feebly.

"That's what I said."

"But—but, confound it, this is important!" said Hal fiercely. "Who the dickens are your secretaries, anyhow?"



"Upon my word!" said Mr. Crowell, as he gazed at the audacious notice on the door. "You're wanted, Handy!" yelled Brewster. "If anybody wants me, he'll have to want!" came the new captain's well-known voice. "Tell him, whoever it is, to go and boil his ugly face!"

"Church and McClure," said Handforth airily.

"First we knew about it!" remarked Church.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I haven't had time to get things fixed up yet," said Handforth, as the cackle subsided. "Anyhow, I can't see you without an appointment, Brewster. Sorry, and all that, but my decision is final."

"But you *are* seeing me!" hooted Brewster, exasperated. "What do you think I am—a shadow? A ghost, or something?"

"You needn't be funny!" said Handforth, frowning. "This interview is unofficial—and I can't recognise it. If you want to discuss football, make an appointment with one of my secretaries, and come again later!"

He closed the door and turned the key.

"Upon my Sam!" said Hal Brewster hoarsely.

"We warned you, old man," murmured Pitt, coming up. "Just at present Handy has got a bee in his bonnet—a bumble-bee, I imagine, by the size of it. He might recover in a day or two, but we've got to give him time. It's no good blaming us—"

"But I do blame you!" snorted Hal Brewster indignantly. "I blame the entire Remove! You elected the lunatic, didn't you? A fine business, to be biffed off the premises when I come here to discuss footer!"

My hat! Blow Handforth! Blow the match! Blow the whole crowd of you!"

He turned on his heel, red with wrath, and stalked furiously out of the building.



CHAPTER 7.

HANDFORTH'S INSPECTION!

HE Remove, with that callousness which is such a characteristic of the school-boy, laughed uproariously over Hal Brewster's wasted

journey. It struck the Remove as being particularly funny.

And yet, at the same time, most of the fellows were secretly sympathetic. After all, it was like Handforth's rot to be a stickler after high-and-mighty formalities in the case of an old friend like Hal.

The thing was, of course, farcical.

No junior captain that St. Frank's had ever known had insisted upon appointments, or suchlike rubbish. A fellow came along to pow-wow about footer, and there was an end of it.

But Handforth had his own ideas about the dignity of his newly-acquired position. A Form captain, according to him, was a person of no less importance than the headmaster himself. Who would dream of coming to

see the Head without having previously made an appointment? (Lots of people, really, but Handforth scoffed at the very suggestion.)

No, a Form captain had to be exclusive. That, according to Handforth's lights, was the very essence of the Junior captaincy. Other skippers had made themselves too cheap—too easy to get at. He was going to alter all that, and make the position of captain a dignified, stately office.

He even insisted upon a desk all to himself in the class-room—a desk set apart from the rest of the Form. Rather to his own surprise, Mr. Crowell readily consented to the innovation, and had a special single desk brought in forthwith.

It struck Mr. Crowell as being a bright idea. Handforth generally caused him more trouble than all the rest of the Remove put together, and so it would be a great advantage to have him separated from the rest, and immediately under his own eye. Mr. Crowell, however, did not think it necessary to explain to Handforth the reason for his ready acquiescence.

If it wasn't obvious to him—and it wasn't—it ought to have been, and it was certainly obvious to the rest of the Form.

Thus, Handforth preened himself afresh.

Another little triumph! No other Form captain was ever honoured by this distinction—a special desk, all to himself, set in front of the rank and file! It was exactly what a Form captain deserved! Even the usual whispering and nudging—the daily scraps of by-play while Mr. Crowell's back was turned—did not strike Handforth as a loss. He was so proud of being alone, in splendid isolation, that he had no desire to indulge in forbidden whisperings. Besides, that sort of thing was altogether below the dignity of a skipper.

And Mr. Crowell, being but human, began to feel that he had scored a triumph by proclaiming Handforth captain. That Monday morning's work was the most peaceful forenoon that he could remember. Not a single disturbance from Handforth from the first lesson to the last! And here he was, right under his very eye all the time! A splendid state of affairs! In fact, it was so successful that Mr. Crowell enthusiastically advised all the other Form-masters to adopt the system.

And Handy, the dear old chump, never guessed that he was the goat!

As soon as lessons were over, he made instant preparations for another innovation. He gathered up his two secretaries, and held a conference on the spot—at the foot of the School House steps. The rest of the Remove, wisely decided to refrain from any chipping. Everybody was wondering what the next move would be.

"Now, you fellows, we've got to start," said Handforth.

"Good!" said Church. "Where are we going?"

"Nowhere."

"Then why start?" asked McClure.

"You ass! We're going to start a new dodge!" said Handforth curtly.

"Oh!"

"Well, not exactly a dodge—I should have said, a new system of supervision," amended Handforth hastily. "That reminds me, my sons. Now that I'm skipper, and you're my secretaries, we've got to be careful in our speech. We've got to set a good example to the Form. No more slang, you understand?"

"Trust us!" said Church.

"No more slang!" repeated Handforth firmly. "I'm going to put my foot down with a hard wallop on all slang! If I hear any silly josses gassing slang in my presence, I shall dot him one on the boko!"

"And there's to be no more slang?" said McClure solemnly.

"No!" said Handforth, nodding. "I'm going to be very strict on that point. A Form captain has got to shove himself on a kind of pedestal, and stay there. He's the big bug of the Form—the chap that all the other idiots look up to as a pattern. I've got to be thundering careful, my sons, and if I don't watch my step I shall come an awful mucker!"

"And there's to be no more slang?" repeated McClure blandly.

"Haven't I told you twice there's to be no more slang?" roared Handforth, glaring. "What's the idea of standing there, and doing an imitation of a gramophone record?"

"I only wanted to know," said McClure.

"Well, you know now!" retorted Handforth. "Don't forget that I'm a pattern!"

"A pattern?" repeated Church.

"Yes—I'm determined to make myself a model skipper."

"You're that already," said Church promptly.

"Oh, well——"

"Everybody knows that a model is an imitation of the real thing!" explained Church carelessly. "Well, what's this new game we're going to start?"

Handforth took a deep breath.

"Wait a minute!" he said thickly. "What's that about me being an imitation? Why, you insulting chump! If you think you can say things like that to me, and get away with 'em, you've got more optimism than a rabbit in a dog-show! Put up your hands, you rotter——"

"Impossible!" said Church, horrified. "What about your dignity?"

"Eh?"

"My dear chap, you can't descend to a mere brawl in the open Triangle!" said Church, in amazement. "What about your example to the rest of the Remove?"

"H'm! Perhaps you're right," admitted Handforth grudgingly. "I'll overlook it this time, but in future you'd better be careful."

We're now going round on a tour of inspection."

"Are we?" said Church.

"Yes, we are!" said Edward Oswald. "I'm not satisfied that the studies are being kept as tidy as I would like."

"Being a great stickler for tidiness yourself," said McClure dryly.

"Eh? Oh, well, how the dickens could Study D be tidy with you fatheads in there?" snapped Handforth. "It's different now, thank goodness. We're going round to all the studies, one after the other. Monday morning inspection, you understand? I'm going to make this a regular weekly feature."

"Our features will be weakly by the time the inspection's over!" said Church gloomily. "Some of the chaps will biff us out on our necks!"

"Let 'em try it on!" retorted Handforth. "And don't make any cheap jokes in front of me, my lad! I'm the captain—and that's my job!"

"Making cheap jokes?"

"Yes! I—I mean——" Handforth paused, and glared. "We'll start with Study A," he added, with a gleam in his eyes. "Ready? Then come on!"

"Half a tick!" urged McClure. "I say, isn't it a bit—— Well, thick?"

"Thick?"

"Well, you know what I mean," said Mac. "Off side!"

"Off side?"

"Hang it, it'll be like interference——"

"There's no question of interference where the Form captain's concerned," said Handforth curtly. "I can go anywhere I like, at any hour I like. Every study is open for my inspection—or will be—by the time I've done! Now that I'm skipper, the Remove is going to be a clean Form—a Form that will be a pattern for every other school to copy from!"

"Ahem!" coughed Church. "There's nothing like modesty!"

"A Form captain can't afford to be modest!" retorted Handforth. "Even at the risk of being called conceited, he's got to think of his Form first, and himself last. I look upon this job seriously—not as a mere side line to occupy my spare minutes, the same as other skippers. I've got a responsibility, and I mean to show everybody that I'm more than capable of coping with it!"

And the ruminy part of the whole affair was that Edward Oswald Handforth really meant every word he said. He took himself seriously—he regarded the captaincy as a solemn trust; although his ideas were entirely revolutionary, he had sufficient courage and aggressiveness to put them into effect. He was the first Remove captain who had ever dared to interfere with tradition. He took himself very earnestly.

Unfortunately, the Remove took him as a joke.



CHAPTER 8.

THE REFORMER ON THE JOB.

"BY GEORGE!"

Handforth uttered the exclamation in a tone of righteous indignation. He was standing in the doorway of Study A, in the Ancient House, and the sight he saw was apparently displeasing to his critical eye. Church and McClure, out in the passage, could guess what it was.

Bernard Forrest was lounging in an easy-chair, smoking a cigarette. Gulliver and Bell, his cronies, were not smoking, but two smouldering cigarettes in the fireplace provided sufficient evidence for a sleuth of Handforth's type.

"By George!" he repeated grimly.

Bernard Forrest rose leisurely to his feet, and made no attempt to remove the cigarette from his lips. An evil glint entered his eyes. He had been suspecting something like this. Only the previous week he and his fellow cads had congratulated themselves upon the fact that they had no housemaster to bother about. Therefore, they would be practically at liberty to take all sorts of chances. Handforth's unexpected election as Form captain had given Forrest pause, and he was half-prepared for this visit.

"Well?" he asked coolly. "Don't trouble to knock, you know. Walk right in. No secrets in this study."

"What," said Handforth ominously, "is that thing in your beastly mouth?"

"This?" said Forrest, removing the cigarette.

"Yes!"

"This is a stick of barley sugar!" said Forrest blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Gulliver and Bell.

"You rotter, it's a cigarette!" roared Handforth.

"Really?" drawled Forrest. "What marvellous eyesight you've got!"

He replaced the cigarette in his mouth with deliberate ostentation—but it didn't stay there long. Handforth considered that this was a calculated affront, not only to himself, but to his authority as Form captain. And a blatant affair of this kind had to be put down with an iron hand.

Edward Oswald took one swift step forward. He knocked the cigarette out of Forrest's mouth and sent it flying across the room. Then he slammed the door behind him and pushed back his sleeves.

"Up with 'em!" he roared. "You've got five seconds!"

"Confound your infernal nerve——" began Forrest.

Crash!

As Forrest had made no attempt to put his hands up, he received Edward Oswald's right on the point of his chin. He fell across the table, and the force of his lurch was so severe that he turned a half-somersault, and landed head downwards on the floor beyond. For an instant his legs waved wildly in mid-

air, and one of them caught Bell a fearful crack on the side of his head.

"That's just to start with!" said Handforth curtly. "I'll show you whether you can turn this study into a chimney or not! I'm skipper now, and I don't allow any smoking."

A box of cigarettes stood on the table. Handforth picked it up contemptuously and flung it in the fire. At the same moment, Forrest rose to his feet, pale with rage, and dishevelled from head to foot.

"That's a new box of fifty!" he snarled hotly.

"All the better!" snapped Handforth. "Remember, this is just a taste! If I catch you smoking in here again I shall take action!"

He turned on his heel and strode out. Church and McClure regarded him curiously as he emerged.

"Trouble?" asked Church.

"Nothing much," growled Handforth. "I found those cads smoking, and Forrest checked me. I biffed him over, and he turned about four somersaults. I gave him fair warning that I shall take action next time!"

"Of course, this time you only hinted at it?" said McClure.

"That's all!"

"Biffing a fellow over, and making him turn three or four somersaults, doesn't really count?"

"Not with a cad like Forrest," replied Handforth gruffly. "By George, I'm going to make these beggars sit up before I've done! Huh! It's about time I took control! The whole Form's in a state of decay!"

"We've only been in one study yet," Church reminded him.

Handforth merely grunted, and strode into Study B. It was empty, Hubbard and Long being elsewhere. Handforth took one look round, and sniffed.

"Disgraceful!" he said curtly. "Look at the litter! Nothing but untidy rubbish and mess! I shall have a word to say to these chaps later on!"

He slammed the door and went into Study C. Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson were at home.

"It'll be a jolly good thing when he comes," Watson was saying. "Stokes is all right—one of the best—but he can't look after two Houses at once. Hallo, Handy!" he added, glancing round. "Anything the matter?"

Handforth walked round the study, scrutinising everything with exaggerated care.

"Lookin' for somethin'?" asked Sir Montie mildly. "Say the word, dear old boy, an' we'll help you—"

"H'm! Not so bad," said Handforth critically. "Might be a bit tidier in this corner. See that it's cleared up before I come again. This litter and stuff is a direct cause of disease. And open that window a bit! I'm going to insist upon fresh air!"

"What the—" began Watson, staring.

"Monday morning inspection!" said Handforth. "I'm a bit lenient to-day, as you

haven't been prepared. But next week I shan't have any mercy!"

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "It's frightfully probable, old boy, that by next Monday you won't be in a position to do any inspectin' at all. I hear that some of the fellows are wagerin' that you won't last more than four days!"

Handforth grinned.

"It only proves how little I'm appreciated," he said calmly. "The Remove is going to pass a public vote of thanks at the end of term, and I shouldn't be surprised if Dick Hamilton seconds the motion!"

"My hat!" glared Watson. "Of all the giddy conceit—"

"No, it's not conceit," interrupted Handforth, shaking his head. "I'm not claiming any particular credit. It's the system that's going to do the trick—the iron rule. Lax methods are useless. A Form captain's job is to use a heavy hand, and to use it often!"

He walked out, and strode past the door of Study D.

"You've missed one!" said Church, pausing.

"Eh?" said Handforth. "That's my study, you ass!"

"Oughtn't you to inspect it, and condemn it as unfit for human occupation?" asked Church.

Handforth did not deign to notice this sarcastic remark. He went into Study E, snorted and glared. Archie Glenthorne was the only occupant, and Archie Glenthorne was stretched full length on the luxurious lounge, fast asleep. The genial ass of the Remove was indulging in his midday nap in order to restore the tissues before dinner.

"Sorry, old man, but duty is duty," said Handforth firmly. "I'll treat you gently this time, but I shan't give you any more chances."

And he proceeded to treat Archie gently by seizing him by one foot and yanking him off the lounge with a violent heave. Archie thudded to the floor, and the back of his head came a frightful crack against the fender.

"Help!" gasped Archie, sitting up. "Good gad! I mean— What ho! Earthquakes and tornadoses!"

"It's only me, you ass!" said Handforth. "I don't allow any slacking in this Form. I'm just giving you the tip."

Archie rose to his feet, and rubbed the back of his head.

"A liberty, by gad!" he said with dignity. "Absolutely and positively a frightful liberty! You dashed blighter! I mean to say, it's a bit over-ripe when a chappie barges into another chappie's quarters, and absolutely biffs him out of dreamland into the blessed fender!"

Archie's tone was indignant, but Handforth waved his hand.

"Don't let it occur again!" he said sternly.

"There are times," said Archie, "when the rich red blood of the Glenthornes surges up in vast quantities, and actuates the good old

muscular department. In other words, dash you, be good enough to take this!"

Thud!

The astonished Handforth took it. He wasn't expecting it. Archie's left came straight out like a ramrod, and caught Handforth in the middle of the chest, and there was a surprising amount of force behind it. Archie wasn't half so soft as he looked. Handforth reeled back, lost his balance, and sat down with a jarring crash in the fireplace. He was more surprised than hurt, and he simply sat there, goggling.

"And that, dash you, is that!" said Archie warmly.

"Why, you—you——" Handforth broke off, and a startled expression came into his eyes. "Hi!" he roared. "I'm on fire!"

He had sat down in the fender with considerable speed, but he arose to his feet in about a quarter of the time. He gave one wild leap, and rose about four feet into the air. His coat-tails, having fallen into the grate, were smouldering and smoking fiercely.

"Good gad!" gasped Archie, staring.

"Quick!" howled Handforth. "Water! Help! Fire!"

Before Archie or his chums could help him, he made a wild dive for the doorway and tore out. He fled down the passage at full speed—a most foolish action, for the wind fanned the smouldering cloth into a sudden flame.

Handforth on fire was a novelty. A few groups of juniors, chatting in the lobby, were startled to see a human torch sweep out into the Triangle. He left a trail of sparks and smoke behind him, to say nothing of a thorough scare. Crowds burst out into the Triangle, and the air was filled with shouts.

out of his watery seat, and there was an anxious inspection. His coat-tails were half missing, and Church lifted them up and breathed a sigh of relief.

"It's all right," he said; "your bags aren't even scorched!"

"But I'm scorched!" howled Handforth. "Ha, ha, ha!"

The crowd, seeing that Handforth was practically unharmed, yelled. The thing was really quite funny. Only Edward Oswald's coat-tails had caught fire, and even this wouldn't have happened, but for the fact that he was wearing a Norfolk suit, instead of Etons. The strict order regarding Etons was being relaxed at St. Frank's, as at many other great public schools. Fellows were not necessarily obliged to wear them.

"A marvellous piece of work, old man," said Pitt, approvingly. "For a moment I thought you were acting for one of the film companies. The way you sat in the fountain pool was a regular treat. A skipper who provides his Form with this sort of amusement is a rare gift from the gods!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's more than a skipper," declared Pitt. "He's an entertainer!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's just what I like to see," went on Pitt stoutly. "A fellow who sinks his own feelings—a fellow who devotes himself wholeheartedly to the task of amusing his Form

is rare enough, and I think we ought to get up a vote of thanks——"

"Will you stop?" roared Handforth fiercely.

"But why?" asked Reggie, in surprise. "I'm praising you——"

"I don't want praise of that sort," snorted Handforth. "I don't want praise of any sort! I just want to do my duty, and I'm not going to have anybody interfering with me in the execution of it!"

"Hear, hear!" declared Pitt. "Bold, stout words, O Chief!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Archie Glenthorne came pushing through the crowd.

"Good gad!" he gasped breathlessly. "Odds fires and conflagrations! I'm frightfully pleased, laddie, to see the good old smile upon the rugged face! I mean to say, all's well, what?"

"Who's smiling?" asked Handforth sourly.

"Well, at least, the good old rear appears to be unblistered!" said Archie, with relief.

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(Full particulars on page 42.)

CHAPTER 9.

THE WOES OF A SKIPPER.

ZZZZZZZZ!

Edward Oswald Handforth sat in the fountain pool, and throngs of juniors came crowding



round.

"Are you hurt, Handy?" gasped Church breathlessly.

"Not a bit!" snapped Handforth. "I like being on fire!"

"No, but really, old man——"

"Wait until I catch Archie!" breathed Handforth. "By George, I—I'll—Lemme go, blow you!"

In spite of his protests, he was hauled

"I mean, no chappie with sundry burns and scorchings in his stern would absolutely bark with such frightful gusto!"

"Do you take me for a dog?" asked Handforth, fiercely.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Better go inside, old man, and change," suggested Church gently. "A master might come along and spot you, and that would mean awkward inquiries. Sure you're not burnt, or anything? I think we ought to massage——"

"I don't want any massaging!" interrupted Handforth curtly.

As it happened, the only hurt portion of him was his dignity. The very speed of his exit from the Ancient House had wafted the heat away from his person, and his prompt measures to extinguish the fire, comic though they had been, had saved him from a really serious catastrophe.

"As for you!" he said, fixing Archie with his gaze. "I'll teach you whether you can push your skipper into the fire or not!"

"Oh, but I say, dash it——"

"So Archie did the valiant deed?" grinned Buster Boots. "Sound man!"

"Good gad and odds life!" said Archie. "The blighter absolutely barged into the good old study, tipped me off the lounge, and I felt obliged, in the interests of humanity, to land him a fair-sized cosh in the sirloin. I mean, when a lad arouses the good old Glenthorne ire, the aforesaid Glenthorne ire is absolutely aroused!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well done, Archie!"

"At the same time, I didn't want to reduce the dear old chappie to absolute dripping, if you know what I mean," continued Archie, with concern. "I sincerely trust, Handy, old horse, that the damages are slight!"

"I'll deal with you later!" said Handforth coldly. "I've been set up to ridicule—me, the Form captain!—and I mean to exact a terrific price!"

"Better go easy, Handy!" advised Fullwood. "You can't goad the fellows too much, you know. There's a limit. We'll put up with you as skipper as long as you keep within bounds—but we're not going to have any of your bunkum!"

"So it's no good kicking against Fate," nodded Reggie Pitt.

"You fatheads!" said Handforth disdainfully. "I'll do as I think best!"

Billy Nation, of the Modern House, shook his head.

"An Ass That Kicketh Against The Wall Receiveth The Blow Himself!" he quoted. "That's what's happened this time, by the look of it!"

"Are you calling me an ass?" breathed Handforth thickly.

"If The Cap Fits, Wear It!" retorted Billy, grinning.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will somebody take this freak away?" said Handforth, glaring at several of the

Fourth-Formers. "He can't do anything else but string out these fatheaded proverbs this term! It's a wonder to me you don't quietly smother him!"

"Billy's all right," grinned Buster Boots. "Why should we smother him when he tells the simple truth?"

"*The Usefulest Truths Are The Plainest,*" agreed Billy.

"I'm fed up," said Handforth, turning away. "What's the good of trying to drive sense into a flock of sheep? I can talk until I'm blue in the face, but it makes no difference. The more I talk the worse you are."

"*The Greatest Talkers Are The Least Doers!*" declared Billy Nation.

"What?"

"*The Noisiest Drum Hath Nothing In It But Air!*" grinned Billy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You sure said a mouthful," chuckled Adams, the American boy. "Gee! You've pulled a bone this time, Handy. This Nation guy is a nifty skate with his wise cracks, too, I'll tell the world!"

"Yes, you look a bit silly, Handy!" said Boots, shaking his head.

Handforth's eyes glittered as a proverb occurred to him.

"*A Wise Man May Look Ridiculous In The Company Of Fools!*" he said, with relish. "That's all I've got to say!"

"Sure?" asked Billy Nation.

"Yes, blow you!"

"*A Fool When He Hath Spoke, Hath Done All!*" said Billy blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All right—all right!" fumed Handforth. "I can't deal with you Fourth-Formers—you're not in my Form. But I've got my eye on you Remove chaps, and I'm going to make you suffer to the limit——"

He broke off, and something seemed to show him the humour of the situation. "Oh, blow!" he added, with a feeble grin. "What's the good of making a fuss over nothing? After all, I was a bit too drastic with old Archie. Let's forget all about it."

"Spoken, I mean to say, like a man," said Archie heartily. "Laddie, bung it absolutely there!"

"Good old Handy!"

Handforth went off to change, his ill-humour completely gone, and the other Remove fellows chuckled.

"He's a good old scout, really," said Reggie Pitt. "But we never know how to take him. Just when he looks like committing general slaughter, he changes his mind, and sees the joke. He's a rummy beggar!"

"Yes, but he's true blue," said Fullwood. "And we're going to have more fun yet."

During the afternoon, Handforth began to wonder, in a vague sort of way, whether his isolated desk in the Form-room was a good idea. Occasionally, a pellet would strike him on the back of the neck, and it was a sheer impossibility for him to detect the culprit, since he was so far removed

from the rest of the Form. Under the old system, he had found it possible to distribute sundry biffs in his immediate neighbourhood, but nothing of that sort was now within his power.

He decided that he would have to think of something different for the morrow, and by the time lessons were over he was full of a new scheme regarding prep. But before he could get Lusy on anything there was tea to consider, and then footer practice on Little Side.

Handforth marched to Study D in an absent-minded mood, after mooching about the Triangle for a quarter of an hour. He expected to find tea made, the table set, and everything ready. Church and McClure always did these things without question: in fact, Handforth had not the slightest inkling of the real value of his long-suffering chums. But he was soon to obtain a glimpse of the truth.

He wandered on rather dreamily, full of the many innovations he was about to introduce. And although he often talked in a disparaging way about tea—as though the meal was a sort of nuisance—he enjoyed it just as much as any of the others.

He went into Study D, and closed the door.

“Now, you chaps——” he began abstractedly.

Then he came to an abrupt stop, and gave a start. Instead of the air being filled with the appetising odour of hot tea and buttered toast, the air was stagnant and chilly. Instead of a warm fire crackling in the grate, there was a dead-looking mass of cold cinders. Instead of the table being spread with sardines and boiled eggs and cakes and pastries, it was cold and bare, and littered with odd bits of paper.

“My hat!” said Handforth, with a chilly clutch at his heart.

CHAPTER 10.

CHURCH AND MCCLURE ENJOY THEMSELVES.



ISMAY was Handforth's chief emotion.

He was aware that he had received a nasty jolt—a hard, jarring eye-opener. Until this moment he had forgotten all about his new arrangement. He had overlooked the fact that he had literally kicked Church and McClure out of Study D, and palmed them off on Hubert Jarrow.

He had performed this master stroke the previous night, after tea had been over and forgotten. The importance of having the study to himself had overshadowed every other consideration.

“Great corks!” he said, aghast.

For the realisation came upon him that he couldn't very well rout out Church and McClure, and force them to prepare tea for

him. They didn't belong to his study now. Naturally, they were having tea up the passage, in Study J.

And he—Handforth—was just as naturally supposed to prepare his own tea. Since he was quite alone, who else was there to perform these duties? Church and McClure had always done everything as a matter of course. They were so accustomed to looking after the fire, making the tea, washing up, and generally busying themselves in the study, that they had done these things automatically. And Handforth had taken it as a matter of course, too.

“Great Scott!” he muttered, scratching his head. “Here's a go!”

He walked over to the fireplace, and gazed at the dead ashes rather dismally. How *did* one make a fire, anyhow? With a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach, he suddenly realised that he hadn't made a fire for weeks—for terms! His chums had always attended to these trifles.

And Handforth's very principles forbade him collaring a weaker junior and compelling him to do the work. That would be tantamount to bullying, for nobody would perform such duties unless they were threatened with physical violence. As for having anybody fag for him, the very thought was unthinkable. True, he was Form captain, and a very important person, but he was down on fagging with a firm hand. It was all right for the Sixth Formers to have their fags, but it had always been Handforth's contention that the juniors should look after themselves. Until this minute he had always overlooked the fact that Church and McClure had always looked after him.

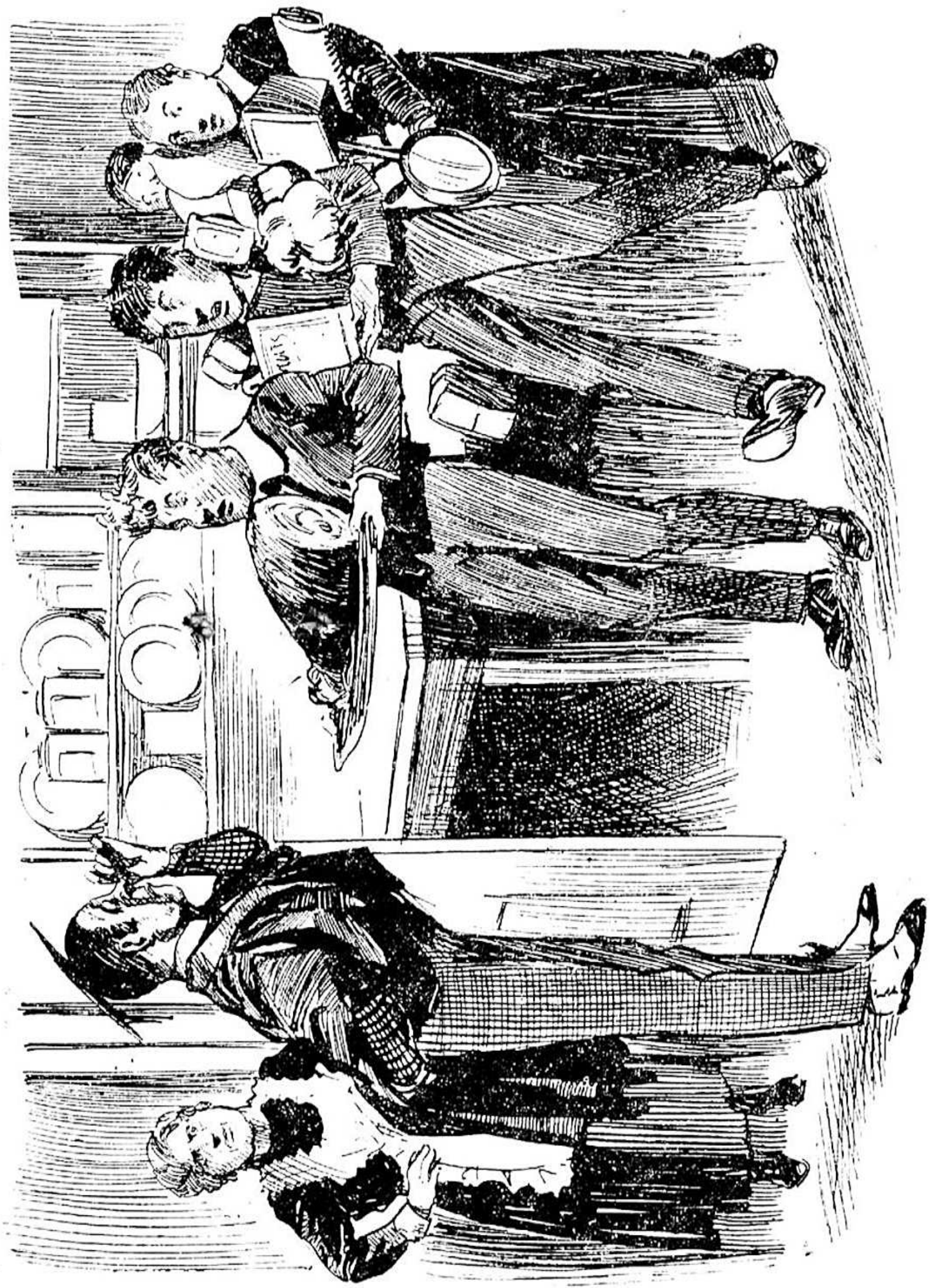
No, there was only one way out of this difficulty—and that was to set to work and light the fire, and prepare his own tea. Either that, or go into Hall for the wishy-washy stuff that the school provided. And no fellow in his right senses would do this as long as he had some money in his pocket.

“Oh, well,” growled Handforth, “I've got the study to myself, anyhow, so I suppose I've got to put up with a few inconveniences. But, by George, I hadn't thought of this! What a beastly lot of rot!”

He looked round for something to light the fire with, and didn't even know where his chums had usually kept the firewood. He hadn't got a match, either. The study was provided with a radiator, so it wasn't exactly cold; but it looked very, very cheerless.

And then Handforth noticed something else.

Opening one of the cupboards in search of firewood, Handforth felt rather like Mother Hubbard. Bare shelves met his gaze. There wasn't a crumb—there wasn't even a tin of sardines or a pot of jam. And, with a start, he noticed that his sole crockery consisted of one plate and one cup. And these weren't much good, either. The plate had a chunk out of it, as though somebody had taken a bite; and the cup was not only minus its



Handforth, staggering under the weight of the ham, stopped dead as he found himself confronted by Mr. Crowell. The irate master eyed the pantry raiders grimly. "What's the meaning of this outrageous behaviour?" he demanded. "Just a little celebration, sir," explained Handforth uneasily.

handle, but there was a crack extending down one side which admitted the daylight.

"Why, the—the rotters!" gasped Handforth. "They've pinched every giddy thing! How the dickens can I make tea— Yes, by George, where's the teapot?"

With a growing sense of acute uneasiness, he dimly remembered that most of the crocks had belonged to Church and McClure. During the previous term there had been a catastrophe in the study. There had been a free fight, and Church and McClure had got the best of it, after making Handforth sit down on a trayful of crockery. And he distinctly remembered compelling them to buy a fresh lot, out of their own money. Naturally, they had taken all these things away when they had changed their quarters.

"Oh, help!" murmured Handforth. "I told 'em to do it, too! I told 'em to shift all their things—every single article—and clear out!"

This recollection rather stunned him. It rendered him helpless. How could he go for his chums baldheaded after they had merely carried out his orders?

He hadn't thought of these things earlier—his head had been so full of other matters that he hadn't even given them a moment's consideration. And he was suddenly aware of the fact that he was simply dying for a cup of tea. He had many times felt that a cup of tea would be comforting, but just now the very smell of it was the one thing he desired above all else.

Edward Oswald was beginning to appreciate the truth of the old saying that one does not miss a thing until one loses it. He looked round the study again, and his heart was heavy. A feeling of misery came over him. The old place wasn't itself—the room's former cheer had departed. Study D was a mere shadow of its old self. Being captain wasn't so riotously jolly, after all!

"But—but it's awful!" breathed Handforth, sitting down with a thud, and staring glassily in front of him. "Before I can have tea I've got to light a fire, buy a kettle, teapot, crocks, grub, and goodness knows what else! And I can't buy those things at St. Frank's, either—only the grub, anyhow. Great corks! I shan't get any tea to-day at all!"

He swallowed something, and sighed.

After all, Church and McClure were pretty useful chaps. Handforth was just beginning to appreciate them to the full. He was realising what a number of things they usually did from sheer force of habit. With a start he understood, for about the first time, that his chums had literally waited upon him hand and foot. For now that they were no longer here, he was like a ship without its rudder.

His dilemma was almost tragic.

"What the dickens can I do?" he moaned. "I can't get along without the bounders, and I daren't ask them to come back, or they'll lord it over me like a couple of Indian rajahs.



Handforth, staggering under the weight of the ham Crowell. The irate master eyed the pantry raiders behaviour?" he demanded. "Just a little

I daren't show a sign of weakness of that sort. And yet I've got to have 'em! My only hat! What a beastly fix!"

He wandered out of the study disconsolately, and paused in the corridor. A faint, tantalising odour of a frying kipper came to his nostrils. A very humble smell, but it touched Handforth's heart, particularly as it was accompanied by the intoxicating aroma of hot tea.

"I say, this is horrible!" he murmured tragically.

He was like a lost sheep. He, the Form captain, absolutely without any tea! It was not only ridiculous, but appalling. But it was simply impossible for him to breathe a word to a living soul. The whole Form would howl at him if it got wind of this situation.

By George, Church and McClure were rather fine chaps! Splendid fellows! Always bustling about and doing things, always making up the fire and tidying the study and making tea—and always doing these things so unostentatiously that he never even noticed it.



pped dead as he found himself confronted by Mr. Jarrow. "What's the meaning of this outrageous violation, sir," explained Handforth uneasily.

Something drew him irresistibly towards Study J. He didn't even know he was going in that direction.

Within Study J, Church and McClure were very cheerful.

"Wonder what old Handy's doing now?" Church was saying, as he passed the plate of toast to Jarrow. "Of course, his fire's out, and he's got no teapot—"

"And he never thought a thing about tea until the last minute," grinned McClure. "We can take these things for granted. Well, I'm happy enough. It'll teach the fathead a lesson. It'll make him appreciate us a bit more, perhaps. Not that we need it—we're not out for that sort of thing, goodness knows. But he deserves a hard jolt for biffing us out last night!"

"Supposing we edge along, and take a peep?" suggested Church.

"No fear!" said Mac. "Our game is to appear absolutely indifferent. That'll bring him to his senses sooner than anything. If he comes here, we'll pretend that we've never been more content in the whole of our

giddy lives. *That's* the stuff to give him, Churchy!"

"Yes," said Church slowly. "I suppose it is."

As a matter of fact, Handforth's chums were nearly as miserable as he was himself. They didn't reveal it to Jarrow—they affected to be serenely happy. What was the use of visiting their troubles upon his head? Besides, he would only jaw for about half an hour, and lead the conversation, by devious routes, to a hundred-and-one inconsequent subjects.

Handforth & Co. were a staunch trio. They didn't even realise themselves how closely they were bound together.

But as soon as they were apart, they subconsciously sensed a feeling of misery. While telling themselves that they were perfectly serene, they knew very well that they weren't.

And Church and McClure, although they had the best of the present situation, were by no means easy in mind. They had looked after Handy for so long that they now felt that their sole occupation in life had gone.

Handforth, out in the corridor, arrived at Study J, and opened the door. He looked in, and reeled slightly. The smell of hot buttered toast, tea, and fried sausages nearly overcame him.

"Hallo!" he said in a hollow voice.

"Hallo, Handy!" said Church cheerily. "Come to inspect us?"

"Eh?" said Handforth unsteadily. "Well, no—I just looked in, you know. Having tea?"

He saw the table through a kind of mist, and his mouth watered as he noted the pile of toast, the delicately-browned sausages, and the steaming tea. By George! They couldn't let him go without inviting him to this gorgeous spread! Incidentally, it was quite an ordinary tea, with nothing special about it at all.

"Yes, we're a bit late," said Church, setting his cup down. "New quarters, you know—not quite settled down yet."

"You—you seem to have just started," said Handforth hintingly.

"Why, yes," agreed McClure. "Lazy beggars, eh? Of course, you've finished your tea long ago. A Form captain can't waste time over tea, naturally. I suppose you're just going up to change for footer practice? We shan't be long, old son."

Handforth leaned against the doorpost, and all the sunlight seemed to fade out of his life.

CHAPTER 11.

HAL BREWSTER TO THE RESCUE.



CHURCH and McClure, being shrewd youths, diagnosed the symptoms without any difficulty. Edward Oswald Handforth, for all his aggressiveness, was a very artless sort of

fellow. For a moment his chums were almost on the point of weakly throwing their good resolutions overboard.

Handforth's abject misery touched them. But it was Edward Oswald himself who made this impossible.

"Footer practice?" he said with a start. "Why, yes, of course! You chaps had better get a hustle on, too!"

"You've had tea, then?" asked Church.

Handforth pulled himself together, and revealed a bold front.

"Tea!" he repeated tartly. "I've got a fat lot of time to bother about tea, haven't I? I'm above that sort of thing! I can't waste my time over nothing! If you chaps are too long, I'll slaughter you!"

He reeled out, and closed the door. The sight of that well-spread table was too much for him. He felt that if he had remained he would have aggressively invited himself to the feed—and that would have been fatal.

For Church and McClure had taken it for granted that he, as Form captain, had finished his tea long ago. And he simply could not admit that his fire was out, and that he had utterly failed to fend for himself! No, the strong course was to get away as quickly as possible, and give his chums the impression that he was perfectly indifferent.

He would have had another eye-opener if he could have known that his chums were in no way deceived. As soon as he had gone, they glanced at one another rather compassionately, and Church shook his head. He held a chunk of sausage on the end of his fork, gazing at it wistfully.

"I say, oughtn't we to have invited the old ass?" he asked huskily.

"No!" growled Mac. "He asked for this, so let him have a jolly good taste of it! Of course, he hasn't had any tea, and he's dying for some! Weakness now, my son, would ruin everything. We've only got to keep it up, and he'll eat out of our hands tomorrow!"

"By jingo, you're right!" agreed Church.

"A very interesting experiment," remarked Jarrow, who had been listening with some amusement. "I take it that you are merely making a convenience of my study? That you will clear out as abruptly as you cleared in—at the crucial moment?"

"Sorry, Jarrow, old man," said Church. "I'm afraid you're right—but you don't mind, do you? And keep it dark, you know—Handy's a good old scout in his own way, and we don't want to crow over him."

"Don't mention it," said Jarrow readily. "For that matter, you can stay here as long as you like—I haven't had such a good tea for weeks! You fellows have an amazing knack of doing things. I mean, you're so tremendously efficient. Efficiency is a quality

I always admire, and you've got it very strongly developed. Speaking of development, I'd like you to have a look at my camera. I was developing some films yesterday, and they all went wrong. Films are funny things. You've got to be so careful— By the way, I understand that Douglas Fairbanks is showing in Bannington this week—that new film of his about pirates and things. But perhaps it's an old one? Bannington's a bit slow with pictures. I always say that Bannington—"

But Church and McClure, with their thoughts centred upon Handforth, weren't listening. Jarrow rambled amiably on, and it didn't matter to him whether his audience was listening or not. In the meantime, Handforth had got back to Study D. He looked in, shuddered, and went out again. He stood in the corridor, shivering. What was a fellow to do? Hang it, he couldn't go into Hall—

"Ah, Brother Handforth, why this pensive mood?" asked William Napoleon Browne, of the Fifth, as he came round the corner. "You resemble a fellow who has just heard that he has been ruthlessly cut out of the will without a shilling. I am at a loss to understand this glassy-eyed preoccupation. I thought the joy-bells were ringing in honour of your recent triumph?"

"Tea!" said Handforth absently. "By George, and fried sausages— Eh? Speaking to me, Browne?"

"Much as it pains me to break in upon your appetising reverie, duty must be done, Brother Handforth," said Browne. "A voice from afar is calling you. In other words, you are wanted on the 'phone."

"The 'phone?" repeated Handforth.

"The telephone."

"The telephone?" said Handforth mechanically.

"This ignorance saddens me," said Browne, shaking his head. "I've always known, of course, that the Remove is a hot-bed of murky ignorance, but I must freely confess that I am now staggered. A telephone, Brother Handforth, is a weird instrument which is greatly maligned by our national humorists, but which is, nevertheless, efficient to a certain degree. It is placed on record that we do sometimes get the number we ask for—and it is even hinted that the local Exchange is controlled by a staff which makes a point of only going to sleep once in every three hours while on duty."

Handforth had heard very little of this alleged witticism.

"I'm wanted on the 'phone?" he said, starting.

"Such is the momentous fact, brother," said Browne.

"Who by?"

"I presume you mean, by whom?" asked the skipper of the Fifth. "It pains me to give these little lessons in English, but—"

Browne paused, for Handforth, without waiting, had marched off to the junior Common-room, where there was a public telephone. Fortunately, Browne, who had re-

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ceived the call in the senior Day-room, had had it switched through to the other instrument. St. Frank's was well provided with telephones.

Handforth entered the sound-proof box, and closed the door.

"Hallo!" he growled, as he placed the receiver to his ear. "Who's that?"

"Brewster!" came Hal's cheery voice. "Did they, by any chance, have to go and dig you out of your grave? I've been waiting here for about ten minutes!"

"Sorry!" said Handforth gruffly. "Old Browne only just told me I was wanted. What's up?"

"How about coming over to tea?" suggested Brewster.

Handforth nearly dropped the receiver.

"Tea!" he yelled joyously.

"My hat! Are you starved, or something?" asked Brewster. "This invite seems to have come pretty opportune, by the sound of your voice—"

"Nunno! I—I was only thinking, you know," said Handforth, pulling himself together with an effort. "Tea?"

"Yes, tea."

"You mean tea?" said Handforth breathlessly.

"Of course I do, you chump!" chuckled Brewster. "Why not get into your Austin Seven, pop over, and we can discuss Wednesday's match while we're browsing on the sausages and mashed?"

"Sausages!" roared Handforth, with a jump.

"Three each!" said Brewster. "We've laid in a good supply!"

"I'll be there in three minutes!" panted Edward Oswald.

"Don't you be so rash—you can't do it in three minutes," said the River House junior. "Besides, tea's a bit late—we haven't fried the sausages yet. What's the time now? Five-fifteen. Get here at about six, old man, and we'll have a ripping spread ready for you."

"Oh, rather!" said Handforth feebly. "But I mean, six—"

He paused, aghast. Six o'clock seemed something like the next century. He wasn't any hungrier than usual, but in his present mood he felt that he hadn't tasted food for epochs.

"Yes, six," said Brewster. "All fixed? Good! Start in about half an hour, and you'll just hit it nicely. But don't come earlier, or we shan't be ready. Is that understood?"

"Yes," said Handforth. "Thanks awfully—"

"Right!" came Brewster's voice. "Foodleoo!"

"But wouldn't half-past five be a lot better?" asked Handforth, licking his lips. "I mean, sausages— Hey! I say, Hal! You fathead! Well, I'm jiggered! The blithering idiot has cut off!"

He hung up the receiver and went out of the box. His hunger had an edge-like keen-

ness—similar to a freshly ground razor. And, after all, he could put in half an hour on Little Side.

"Yes, by George!" he murmured happily. "Then, at a quarter to six, I'll tell the chaps to carry on, and I'll buzz off. I'll leave 'em in the dark as to where I'm going! It always pays to be a bit mysterious!"

He went out in a cheery mood, and found that the weather conditions were not exactly ideal for football practice. Heavy clouds had rolled up, a premature darkness had fallen, and the skies were weeping. The rain splashed dismally down into the Triangle.

"Oh, rats!" said Fullwood as he joined Handforth at the doorway. "This has made our footer practice look a bit sick, eh?"

"Oh, I don't know—" began Handforth.

"Then we do!" put in Church as he came up. "None of your rot, Handy! You might make the chaps practise in the rain—but you're not going to supply us with acetylene flares, I suppose? We can't play in the dark!"

"No," said Handforth absently. "Who said we could? As a matter of fact I'm going out soon. So it doesn't matter."

"Going out?"

"Yes—business," said Handforth carelessly.

"Something to do with the captaincy, eh?"

"I've just been on the 'phone, you know," said Handforth with exaggerated indifference.

"Brews— I mean, hot sausages— The fact is," he added hastily, "it's very urgent business, and I can't disclose it."

He stalked off, and Fullwood chuckled.

"Observe the deductions of a sleuth!" he said. "I will now elucidate the mystery. Handforth has been invited to tea by Brewster, and they're going to have hot sausages. Elementary, my dear Watson—elementary!"

And Church and McClure glanced at one another and were content. When Edward Oswald Handforth was forced to go out on a wet night, and travel two or three miles to get his tea, it was a sure sign that his plight was pretty desperate!



CHAPTER 12.

STILL TEA-LESS.

URRRRRRRR!

The engine of Handforth's neat little Austin Seven purred with unbounded energy, and seemed anxious to be off. It was just twenty minutes to six, and Handforth simply couldn't wait any longer. Hot sausages had become an obsession with him—particularly as Church and McClure had partaken of that very same fare themselves—and the only road in the world led to the River House School. The thing was really ripping. Without anybody at St. Frank's knowing, he could have his tea, and pretend that he had merely gone over to see Brewster about the football!

Handforth was in the very brightest of moods. Tea at St. Frank's was out of the

question. It was too late to go into Hall, it was impossible to invite himself to somebody else's feed, and the very thought of Study D made him wince. Brewster's invitation had come like a shower in the desert.

There was nobody to see Handforth off, and he was pleased. It was raining fairly hard now—not heavily, but with a drizzling persistence. And it was almost dark, owing to the lowering clouds. He pressed the accelerator, and the Austin Seven sang sweetly as she nipped across the Triangle.

"I'll just do it nicely," murmured Handforth, with keen satisfaction. "There by six, an hour for tea—and a quarter of an hour home. That leaves me a few minutes to spare before calling-over. Good egg!"

He was indifferent to the weather—for he considered himself to be an all-the-year-round motorist. With the hood and side-curtains in position the little Austin was as cosy as possible, and with the head-lamps on, the lane was brilliant.

"By George, what a coincidence!" murmured Handforth. "Hot sausages in Study J, and I'm blessed if old Brewster isn't having the same giddy spread! Jolly decent of him, too. After all, I was a bit short with him this morning."

"Short," was scarcely an adequate term—for Handforth had been decidedly shorter than short. But Brewster was a good-natured fellow, and it seemed clear that he had forgiven and forgotten.

With his mind lingering lovingly on the coming feed, Handforth drove down the lane. In fancy, he saw himself toying with a delicately browned sausage, and, of course, there would be toast and cakes, not to mention pots and pots of steaming tea—

"Hallo!" murmured Handforth. "Who's this josser?"

He came back to earth, for a man was standing in the middle of the road, holding both his arms up—a clear signal to Handforth to stop. The stranger was wearing a mackintosh, and on that road were two big suitcases. Apparently, he had been trudging along in the rain.

"Nerve!" growled Handforth, as he applied the brakes and pulled up.

He opened the door and looked at the man. He was tall and slim, with a small moustache on his upper lip. A youngish man, and evidently in no particularly good humour.

"Are you from St. Frank's?" he snapped irritably.

"Why, yes—"

"I thought so—I thought so!" said the stranger. "It's a pity you couldn't get to the station in time, young man! Making me trudge all through this filthy mud, and in this rain, too!"

"The station?" repeated Handforth blankly.

"Don't sit there staring!" rapped out the other. "Help me to put these suitcases in the car! Why on earth you couldn't be at the station to meet me is a mystery! I shall

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“speak to Dr. Stafford pretty sharply about this!”

“But—but——”

“Don’t argue, boy—I’m in no mood for nonsense!” said the man. “When I found there was no car to meet me at the station I was furious—I am still furious! Confound it, why don’t you move yourself——”

“But—but I can’t help your troubles!” broke out Handforth warmly. “I wasn’t sent to the station to meet you, or anybody else! I’m going to the River House School to have tea and hot sausages—— I mean——”

“Oh!” interrupted the other. “In that case, perhaps I was a little too brusque. I am sorry, my boy. Please forgive me—but one is apt to be rather hasty on a night like this. Perhaps you will be good enough to give me a lift to the school?”

“But—but it’s not far, you know——”

“Nevertheless, it is still raining, and these Lags are heavy,” said the stranger. “By the way, which House do you belong to?”

“Why, the Ancient House——”

“Splendid! The very House I am entering myself!” said the new arrival with more cordiality. “This is a fortunate meeting, indeed.”

“You!” gasped Handforth. “But—but you’re too old!”

“The Ancient House is in need of a temporary housemaster, I believe,” said the other dryly.

Handforth started, and remembered the rumours that had been floating about during the early part of the day. So they were founded upon fact! And this tall, rather hasty-tempered man was the new temporary housemaster! At any other time Handforth would have been all over him, so to speak, particularly as he was the junior skipper. But just at present he had a vision of a cosy study in the River House School, with a kettle singing on the hob, and a frying-pan sending forth curling wreaths of savouriness.

He brought himself back to earth with a jerk.

“Oh, so—so you’re our new housemaster, sir?” he asked. “Awfully pleased to see you, sir. We heard a few rumours——”

“Mr. Fakenham,” said the other, smiling. “Mr. Weir Fakenham——”

“Oh, so that’s your name, sir?” said Handforth. “I don’t mind giving you a lift to the school, Mr. Fakenham. As a matter of fact, I’m the junior skipper of the Ancient House, and you couldn’t have met a more appropriate chap. Handforth’s my name, sir—captain of the Remove.”

“Better and better, Handforth,” said Mr. Fakenham. “But I am still standing in the rain, and my bags——”

“Oh, sorry, sir!” said Handforth quickly.

He struggled out, and had the two dripping suit-cases in the rear of the car in no time. The new Housemaster took his seat in front, and Handforth resumed the wheel. With a few deft movements, backwards and forwards, he had soon turned the car about and was purring back to the school.

The distance was quite short, but Mr. Fakenham, of course, was a stranger, and didn’t know the locality. So Handforth excused him. Besides, one couldn’t very well do as he wished with a housemaster—and Handforth was aware, moreover, that it would be a good move on his part to get into Mr. Fakenham’s good books before he was officially introduced to the House.

Six o’clock was striking as the car pulled up in the deserted Triangle, and Edward Oswald started. Six o’clock! And he was still tea-less! He mentally growled at the working of Fate. Whenever a chap wanted to get somewhere particularly quickly, something was bound to butt in and mess it up!

“Here you are, sir—this is the Ancient House,” said Handforth, nodding towards the steps. “You’ll find plenty of chaps inside, and they’ll soon show you round. Or if you want to go straight to the Head——”

“No, young man, I don’t want to go straight to the Head,” interrupted Mr. Fakenham. “As it happens I want to talk to you.”

“To me, sir?”

“Yes—to you.”

“Oh, but—but, you see—— The fact is, sir—— Well, I mean, I was just starting off—— Tea, you know, and hot——”

Handforth paused, becoming somewhat incoherent. Was ever a fellow put into such a perfectly ghastly position? He was simply dying for that spread in Hal Brewster’s study. And yet here was a new Housemaster, asking—positively and absolutely asking—for his company! And he, as junior skipper, felt that it was his duty to accept Mr. Fakenham’s suggestion without demur.

‘Twixt tea and duty! That was what it amounted to.

On any ordinary evening Handforth wouldn’t have cared a brass button about tea. But there seemed to be something uncanny about to-night’s feast. The fates were evidently determined to make him go hungry.

“Yes,” said Mr. Fakenham, during the pause, “I want to speak to you quite privately, Handforth. I think you said your name was Handforth? And you are quite sure that you are the junior captain of the Ancient House?”

“Why, of course, sir!”

“Then I have something very important for your own especial ear,” said Mr. Fakenham, rather mysteriously. “I regard this opportune meeting as a good augury. The very boy I desired to become acquainted with I meet first. Splendid! Yes, Handforth, I have something for your private ear—and it is, indeed, imperative that I should discuss matters with you without any delay.”

Handforth’s last memory of the tea at the River House faded away. He swelled almost visibly. Hunger completely vanished, and he was no longer aware of it. Tea! What absolute rot—when a new Housemaster had something of importance for his especial ear!

CHAPTER 13.

HANDFORTH RECEIVES HIS ORDERS!



HERE was something about Mr. Fakenham's air which appealed strongly to Handforth's love of the mysterious. The new

arrival was rather youngish for a Housemaster, but if it came to that, Mr. Beverley Stokes was hardly any older. The St. Frank's governors were believers in young men.

It was the new Housemaster's mysterious manner which so attracted Handforth. Besides, he was recognised at his true worth! Mr. Fakenham knew that he was the junior skipper, and he wished to speak to him even before he interviewed the Head! Why, this was the sort of thing that Handforth had dreamed about!

"You—you mean you want me to take you straight to your study, sir?" asked Handforth eagerly.

"That is exactly what I mean," said Mr. Fakenham, nodding. "I shall delay my visit to the headmaster until six-thirty. It is quite possible that Mr. Stokes will greet me at once, but, if so, the delay will only be brief. To be candid, Handforth, I *must* have this private word with you at once."

"Oh, rather, sir!" said Handforth, filled with curiosity.

They went indoors, and found everything quiet. On such a wet evening, the fellows were either in their studies, or in the comfortable common-rooms. Handforth led the way down the corridors to the Housemaster's study, carrying one of the suit-cases.

Just before they got there, as they were turning a corner, they ran into Mr. Beverley Stokes himself. The Housemaster of the West House paused, and looked inquiringly at the stranger.

"All right, Handforth—you can go straight on," said Mr. Fakenham, smiling. "Wait for me—I will join you at once!"

"Yes, sir," said Handforth.

He was rather worried. The very thing he hadn't wanted! Perhaps Barry Stokes would keep the new Housemaster jawing for half an hour. Handforth entered the study, switched on the light, and put the bag down.

But he needn't have worried. Mr. Fakenham joined him within half a minute, and he came in, closed the door, and looked round the apartment with approval.

"H'm! Quite home-like," he said genially. "I had a word with Mr. Stokes, and I must say that I like him. But you are more important just now. Handforth—I can pow-wow with Mr. Stokes later on in the evening, perhaps. Sit down, young 'un—make yourself at home. I always like to be on the friendliest terms with my boys."

Handforth sat down, and had already formed the opinion that Mr. Fakenham was the kind of Housemaster he liked. Even better than Barry Stokes! Thank goodness the latter

hadn't barged in, and spoilt the privacy of this personal chat.

"Yes, I always like to be on the friendliest possible terms with my boys," repeated Mr. Fakenham, as he sat down and lit a cigarette. "And that, to let the cat out of the bag, Handforth, is the main reason for this present interview."

"What, being friendly, sir?"

"Exactly!" said Mr. Fakenham, nodding. "As far as I know, you are the only boy who knows of my arrival. One or two others may have seen us, but they know nothing for certain. I want to spring just a little surprise."

"By George! How, sir?" asked Handforth eagerly.

"Well, what about a little celebration?" suggested the new Housemaster. "A feast—a feed as I think you call it? A junior spread, in honour of my arrival? How does that fit the bill?"

"But—but I don't quite understand—"

"Lest you should gain the opinion that I am conceited, I had better amplify my little scheme," said Mr. Fakenham, with a chuckle. "I want to meet my boys here—and I am naturally alluding to the junior boys only—in the friendliest possible manner. I detest formalities, Handforth. And how better could I meet them than to make a smiling appearance at the commencement of a—er—feed? During the course of the little celebration—quite a free-and-easy affair—how easy it will be for me to become acquainted with all you youngsters."

Handforth began to scent the idea.

"Ripping, sir!" he agreed. "As it happens, I'm a new Form skipper, and I'm just getting the chaps into shape. This feed idea will help me a lot, too. There's nothing like grub for making everybody happy."

He had a fleeting vision of hot sausages, but sternly dismissed it.

"You mean, you're going to give orders for something special, sir—before the usual hour for supper?" he went on. "Well, I'll help—"

"One moment, Handforth—one moment," interrupted Mr. Fakenham gently. "I want you to take the credit for this little idea. As Form captain, it will be your due. You have a dining-room here, I presume?"

"Yes, of course, sir."

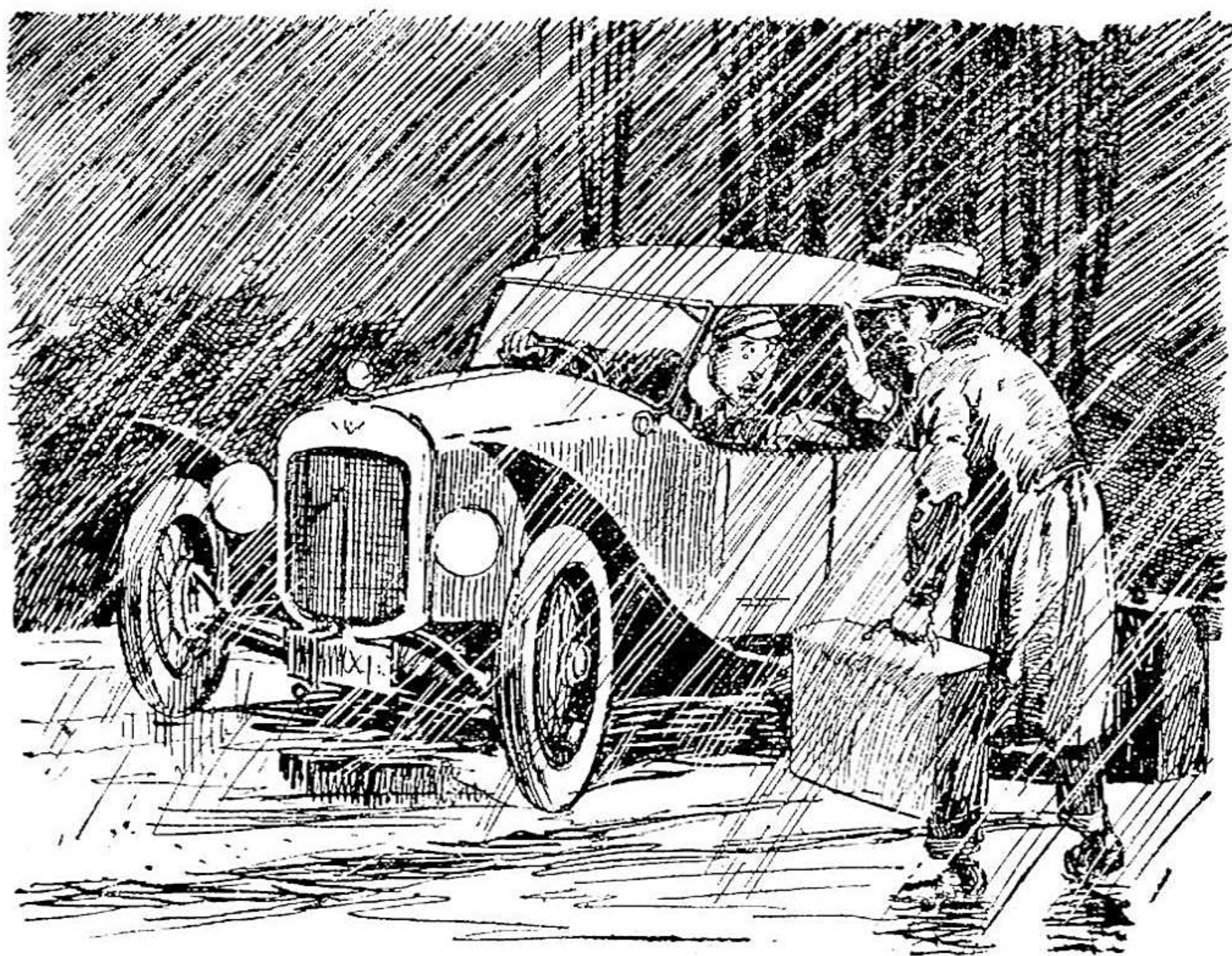
"And kitchens, and so forth?"

"Well, naturally, sir."

"Then it is perfectly simple," said Mr. Fakenham. "All you have to do is to take a number of boys—all the Remove juniors in this House, if you like—and raid the kitchens and store-rooms!"

"Raid them, sir?" gasped Handforth.

"Ahem! A schoolboy term, I believe!" smiled the newcomer. "Lead these boys on a foraging expedition, Handforth. Take what food you like, and prepare a royal spread in the dining-room—say for seven-thirty. Make it appear that this scheme is your own, you see?"



Handforth stared through the pouring rain at the angry man. "I wasn't sent to the station to meet you!" Handy said warmly. "I'm going to River House School to have tea and hot sausages!" But that's where Handy was mistaken—there was going to be no tea for him that evening.

"But—but Mrs. Poulter might kick up a shindy, sir!"

"Mrs. Poulter?"

"She's the House matron, sir——"

"Let her kick up what shindy she pleases, young 'un," said Mr. Fakenham, waving his hand. "Why should you care? Always remember that you have my permission."

"By George, yes, sir!" breathed Handforth. "And you're the Housemaster!"

"You have my full permission to carry this scheme into effect," continued Mr. Fakenham genially. "Take your boys—raid the kitchens—and prepare the feast in the dining-hall. Our little secret, eh? Some of the boys may be quite scandalised when you suggest it—but they won't know the inner facts, will they?"

Handforth took a deep breath.

"They'll be too scared to back me up, sir, unless I tell them——"

"You must tell them nothing," interrupted Mr. Fakenham firmly. "That would ruin everything. Haven't I already told you that the whole idea is to spring a surprise? The boys don't know I'm here—and you must give the impression that this feast is a little brain-wave of your own. Afterwards, of course, when the truth comes out——"

Mr. Fakenham paused, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, that's all right, sir, then," said Handforth. "I shouldn't like to take credit for an idea that isn't mine, you know."

"I am quite certain, Handforth, that such a thing is perfectly contrary to your character," said Mr. Fakenham solemnly. "And always remember, from the very moment you leave this study, that you have my full, unqualified permission to arrange this feast. You are doing it with my complete sanction, and with my heartiest approval."

"Thanks awfully, sir!"

"That will arm you very effectively against any possible objections on the part of the others," continued Mr. Fakenham. "They, of course, will not know of our little plot, and will consequently be astonished at your apparent daring. But we'll have our little joke, eh, Handforth?"

He leaned across and dug Handforth playfully in the ribs.

"Oh, I say, sir!" gurgled Edward Oswald. "What a lark!"

Mr. Fakenham chuckled.

"There's nothing like a good joke to put everybody into a sunny humour," he said.

"I shall remember my coming, young 'un! And I have no doubt that you will remember it, too!" he added, with a twinkle. "Perhaps you will remember it even more vividly than I!"

"I say, you're a sport, sir!" said Handforth enthusiastically.

"I have been told so on other occasions," agreed Mr. Fakenham. "Remember, if anybody tries to stop you, Handforth, take no notice. A Form-master might possibly raise objections—a prefect or two might forbid you to carry on. If any of these things happen, just ignore them."

"Ignore them, sir?"

"Why not?" said the other. "Are Form-masters and prefects in higher authority than a Housemaster? Have I not impressed upon you that you have my full permission?"

"By George, so you have!" grinned Handforth. "What a priceless lark, you know! If Mr. Crowell, or any of the prefects jump on us while we're raiding the giddy kitchens, I can simply refuse to explain, and carry on!"

"Exactly!"

"And you'll put it right afterwards, sir?"

"Surely, Handforth, you do not think I would suggest this scheme if there was any possibility of trouble?" asked Mr. Fakenham smilingly. "I can give you my full assurance that I shall get into no trouble whatever. You can take that for granted. The great secret is to announce this scheme as your own, and to carry it into effect as quickly as possible. Don't tell anybody that I have been here, or that I have given you these instructions. But you can go straight ahead with the calm, comforting assurance that you are doing it all with my sanction."

"Yes, sir."

"With my full permission," declared Mr. Fakenham. "Is that clear?"

"Well, sir, you've told me six or seven times—"

"With a purpose, Handforth—I can assure you, with a purpose," said Mr. Fakenham. "Now, I have one or two things to attend to, so you can hurry off and get to work. Perhaps I shall go and see the Head, or perhaps I shall have another chat with Mr. Stokes. It all depends."

Handforth nodded, and took his departure, full of the great scheme. Mr. Fakenham made sure that the door was closed, and then he went to the telephone.

"Bannington four-seven-one," he said crisply.

A brief wait, and a voice came over the wire.

"That you, Hal?" said Mr. Fakenham.

"Yes!" came the voice of Hal Brewster. "Well?"

"It's worked, my young genius!" grinned Mr. Fakenham happily. "Without any reservations, it has unquestionably worked!"

"Handy swallowed the yarn?" asked Brewster. "The game's going ahead?"

"Like a dream!" replied Mr. Fakenham.

"Come along as soon as you like. I'm quitting while I'm still safe. Perhaps I shall go and see the Head, as I just told Handforth—and perhaps I shan't!"



CHAPTER 14.

STARTLING THE REMOVE.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH paused in the Remove passage, and his eyes were gleaming with an intense expression of glee. He was feeling enormously proud of the fact that the new Housemaster had taken him so fully into his confidence.

And what an idea, too!

A feed of celebration! A feast in honour of Mr. Fakenham's arrival! And all done in such a way that the fellows would be mystified. But he—Handforth—would have the calm, comforting assurance that he was doing everything with Mr. Fakenham's sanction.

This was the trump-card which he would hold up his sleeve. A feed was always a happy inspiration, but this evening it seemed a sheer gift from the gods—for Handforth hadn't had any tea, and he was ravenous. What did it matter about Hal Brewster's hot sausages now? There was something infinitely bigger on the programme. And it was the duty of the Form captain to get his men on the job without delay. Mr. Fakenham appeared to have plenty of confidence that Handforth would be capable of working this oracle.

Edward Oswald quickly made up his mind.

"Common-room—at once!" he said curtly, as he put his head into one of the studies. "Something important—Form captain's orders!"

The study happened to be occupied by De Valerie and Somerton.

"Rats!" said Val. "We can't be bothered

"Urgent!" snapped Handforth. "I've got a great scheme!"

He went out, and hurried from study to study, giving the same instructions. Then he went along to the Common-room. Fellows were coming in all the time—for the majority of them had detected a peculiarly excited note in his voice, and had scented something out of the usual.

"Everybody here?" said Handforth, at length. "Where's Pitt? Where's Burton? Where's Onions—"

"You ass, they're West House fellows," said Fullwood. "If you meant this to be a Remove meeting, you ought to have said so."

"Oh, West House fellows!" frowned Handforth. "I'd forgotten. Well, it doesn't matter—they don't count in this affair. This is purely an Ancient House celebration. I want a dozen volunteers."

"Is this one of your big stunts?" asked Watson politely. "Is this the beginning of your great campaign?"

NEXT WEDNESDAY!

“HANDFORTH’S FLAG DAY!”

Handforth insisted upon it!

Church and McClure tried to stop him—but Handy wouldn’t listen.

A Flag Day was a good idea—so they had it.

And they had a lot of trouble, too!

Everybody except Edward Oswald saw the joke, and—

But read about it in next Wednesday’s lively long complete yarn.

Look out also for

“THE GREEN EYE!”

It’s another thrilling complete detective-adventure story featuring Nelson Lee and Nipper.



Collared! Handy's flag day doesn't look such a bright idea now! Read all about it next week—and look out for this fine cover.

HAVE YOU YET APPLIED FOR YOUR ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE BADGE?

ORDER IN ADVANCE!

“Twelve ought to be enough,” said Handforth, ignoring the query. “Twelve for the kitchens, and another twelve to prepare the table. A feed, my lads—that’s the order of the hour.”

“A feed!”

“Good old Handy!”

“We always knew you were the right man!”

The juniors waxed warmly enthusiastic.

“The most ripping feed you could wish for!” said Handforth, nodding. “I want twelve volunteers to help me raid the kitchens.”

“To do *what*?” asked Church, staring.

“Raid the kitchens!”

“Oh, rather!” said Fullwood. “Don’t all fall over yourselves, you chaps! I suppose this is where we laugh?”

“You’re crazy, Handy!” said McClure, frowning.

“Of course, I knew you’d say that,” went on Handforth complacently. “But I’m not crazy, and it’s not a joke, and there’s no need to laugh. Shall I say it again? I want

twelve fellows to come with me to raid the kitchens and store-rooms.”

“We heard you the first time,” said Church. “Either you’ve gone off your rocker, or you’re trying to be funny. Wouldn’t you like another twelve volunteers to raid the local bank? One’s just as likely as the other!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“I’m Form captain, and I know what I’m talking about,” said Handforth, glaring. “I don’t want to hear any more of this cackling! I’m talking seriously, and I want you to take me seriously. Twelve of us are going to raid the kitchens for grub, and another twelve are going to set the table for the feed in the dining-hall. I’ve made up my mind to hold a celebration.”

“Yes, but you haven’t made up our minds,” said De Valerie.

“Absolutely not!” agreed Archie Glen-thorne stoutly. “I mean to say, I’m ready to dash into the good old fray if it’s a question of a House raid, or something frightfully thrilling like that. But, good gad, what would

the pater say if Archie rolled home with the good old sack?"

"The sack!" said Handforth.

"We should all be sacked if we raided the kitchen openly, you priceless fathead!" said Church. "What's come over you, Handy? Even if we didn't get sacked, we should be swished pretty stiffly!"

Handforth was still serene. He knew something that the others didn't. He had Mr. Fakenham's full permission to go ahead!

"You won't get sacked, and you won't get swished," he said calmly. "If I don't get volunteers, I'll use other methods! Why, you—you ungrateful rotters! Here am I, suggesting a ripping feed, and you won't back me up! I'll take full responsibility."

"That's a fat lot of consolation!" grunted McClure.

"Full responsibility!" repeated Handforth. "I'm Form captain, and you can all enter this thing freely and openly. If there are inquiries, refer to me. If there's any question of punishment, I'll take it all. I shan't let anybody suffer. As skipper of the Remove, I'm giving these orders."

"Half a minute!" said Fullwood curiously. "If we go ahead with this raid, you'll take the full blame?"

"There isn't any question of blame," said Handforth. "I've got permission——"

"What?"

"I mean, you've got my permission to get busy," said Handforth hastily. "Now, I don't want any rot! I can't speak plainer, can I? Back me up, and I'll guarantee that you won't come to any harm."

"Honour bright?" asked several juniors dubiously.

"Honour bright!"

Handforth spoke so vehemently that the fellows wavered.

"Oh, but this is rot!" growled Fullwood. "What guarantee can you give, Handy? A fine set of asses we shall look if we raid the kitchens and then get it in the neck! Mr. Stokes won't punish you alone——"

"Mr. Stokes won't have anything to do with it," interrupted Handforth coldly. "I know what I'm doing. You needn't have any qualms. This is a Form captain's job, and I'm giving my orders. I don't want any more silly objections."

"Yes, but——"

"If Mr. Stokes or anybody else tries to interfere, I'll satisfy 'em!" said Edward Oswald firmly. "I won't let anybody suffer. It's your duty to back me up—and as junior skipper, I insist."

Fullwood and De Valerie and Church and McClure retired into a corner with Russell and Watson and a few others—all the principal fellows.

"Of course, he's off his rocker," said Fullwood. "But it might be a good idea to back him up."

"My dear chap, are you dotty, too?" asked McClure, aghast.

"No—but it'll teach the chump a jolly good lesson," said Fullwood. "He means

what he says about taking all responsibility, and we can rely upon him to face the music."

"But, hang it, we can't let him go into this like a lamb to the slaughter!" objected Church uneasily. "It's a bit too thick——"

"No, it isn't," said McClure grimly. "You're right, Fully. Now I come to think of it, it'll be the best way to bring him out of that giddy trance! If he comes a cropper on his very first day as Form skipper, he'll be subdued."

"Just my argument," nodded Fullwood. "Besides, this raid won't develop. It'll only be a beginning. We'll pull him up before it goes too far."

Handforth strode over, and glared.

"Well, what's all this jawing about?" he asked. "Am I going to be defied, or——"

"All right, Handy—you want volunteers, and you can have 'em," said Church blandly. "The scheme is to raid the kitchens, eh? Have a feed in the dining-hall? Good!"

"Let's go!" said Adams briskly.

Some of the other fellows were rather staggered.

"But—but it's too risky!" gasped Hubbard.

"Rats!" said De Valerie. "Handy's taking all responsibility, so we can leave the explanations to him if there's any trouble. You'll accept all the blame, won't you, Handy, old man?"

"There won't be any blame!" retorted Handforth. "Come on—there's no time to waste."

And, satisfied that their Form captain was intent upon qualifying for the sack, the Removites marched out of the Common-room in a body.



CHAPTER 15.

WITH FULL PERMISSION!

MOST of the fellows regarded it merely as a rag, for they had no actual intention of raiding the kitchens, as Handforth supposed. And as long as they didn't commit any violence, and as long as Handforth took the blame, no very serious consequences would result.

Church and McClure were rather worried. It was obvious to them that their leader had some sort of bee in his bonnet, but they couldn't understand what it was. He was hungry, of course—since he had had no tea—but that fact didn't provide a reason for this extraordinary decision to raid the domestic quarters.

"This captaincy business has got into the poor old chap's head," said Church sadly. "He seems to think he's a giddy emperor, or something. He's only got to give his orders, and we can do any old thing he likes!"

"Let's wait and see what happens, anyhow," said McClure.

Handforth, at the head of the crowd, was the first to open the baize-covered door which

separated the domestic quarters from the rest of the House, and he entered the kitchen as though he were a general taking command of a conquered fortress.

"Three of you ransack these cupboards, and get everything you can lay hands on!" he said briskly. "Three more of you can have a shot at these other cupboards—"

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" said Mrs. Poulter, suddenly appearing in the kitchen, and looking at Handforth with considerable warmth. "Out of my kitchen, young gentlemen! Whatever has come over you? You know well enough that you're not allowed—"

"That's all right, Mrs. Poulter," interrupted Handforth. "This is a special occasion. We've come here for grub!"

"For what?" said the amazed matron.

"Grub—food!" explained Edward Oswald. "And it's no good making a fuss, either. Take my advice, Mrs. Poulter, and stand aside. I've given my orders, and they've got to be carried out!"

"Oh, indeed, have they?" said Mrs. Poulter hotly. "Well, I declare, I never heard of such a thing! How dare you! Out of my kitchen this instant, Master Handforth! I won't have you here! I'm surprised at you! You know that it's against all the rules—"

Handforth made a sweeping gesture to his men.

"On with the raid!" he said grimly. "Get all the food you can lay hands on, and choose only the best! This feed has got to be a special one!"

"Master Handforth!" exclaimed Mrs. Poulter.

"Sorry, Mrs. Poulter, but this is my affair!" interrupted Handforth gruffly. "You'll know all about it later on, but just at the moment I can't be bothered with any interruptions!"

The good lady was fairly startled—and with excellent reason. She had never experienced anything like this before, and her amazement turned to genuine anger.

"Don't you dare to touch any of my cupboards!" she said frantically. "Master Handforth! I'll go straight to your Form-master and tell him what you're doing! I won't have this outrageous interference—"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Handforth. "All this fuss! It's only a feed, Mrs. Poulter! And there's nothing to worry about—"

"You'll see whether there's nothing to worry about, young man!" panted the matron breathlessly. "You'll see whether I'm going to allow this to go on! Well, I declare! I never saw the like!"

She bustled out, fairly bristling with anger.

"Better chuck it up, Handy," said Church uneasily.

But Handforth, to the astonishment of the other fellows, was just as serenely cool as ever. He had Mr. Fakenham's full authority to go ahead with this raid, and wasn't Mr. Fakenham the new Housemaster? By George! These fatheads would have a shock

when they learned that he was in the right all the time!

"Chuck it up?" he repeated. "My dear ass, we haven't started yet! You needn't worry—I'm on safe ground, and I know exactly what I'm up to. Now then, these cupboards. Sorry, Mary Jane, but you'll have to shift!"

Mary Jane, one of the maidservants, held her ground.

"Indeed, Master Handforth, I shan't shift!" she said stoutly. "Whatever's come over you? You can't come down here—"

But Handforth turned to another cupboard, and pulled the door open. His eyes gleamed. A new ham met his gaze—prime, cooked, and ready for cutting.

"Good egg!" he said heartily. "Here you are, Mac—take hold of this! We've made a jolly good start, anyhow!"

He staggered away from the cupboard with the ham, and Church wisely backed away. McClure had completely vanished.

"Here you are!" said Handforth, barging into Fullwood.

But at that very moment Mr. Crowell appeared, accompanied by the hot, flustered Mrs. Poulter. And Handforth, in a manner of speaking, was caught with the goods on him. He still had the ham clutched in his embrace.

"Handforth!" thundered Mr. Crowell. "What is this I hear?"

"I don't know, sir," said Handforth. "How can I know what you hear, sir?"

"Don't attempt to be funny, you young rascal!" snapped Mr. Crowell. "I am amazed, I am shocked, that you, the captain of my Form, should have the startling audacity to—to raid the food supplies of the House!"

Handforth was at a great disadvantage. That ham was a huge one, weighing something like twenty pounds, and it was resting on a dish which might have come from a giant's household. No self-respecting Form captain could be quite dignified with this encumbrance in his grasp. And there was no table handy where he could deposit it.

"It's all right, sir!" he panted. "Don't blame these other chaps. I take full responsibility, sir—"

"That is neither here nor there, Handforth," broke in Mr. Crowell. "Good gracious, boy! Put that ham down at once! Mrs. Poulter tells me that you came here with the deliberate intention of ransacking her cupboards."

"Yes, that's right, sir."

"What!" barked Mr. Crowell.

"Just a little celebration, sir," explained Handforth, as he reeled under the weight of the ham. "Can't somebody take this fat-headed thing away? Here, Watson! And you, Tregellis-West! Grab hold of this, and rush it off to the dining-hall!"

Mr. Crowell fairly goggled.

"The boy must be mad!" he said breathlessly. "Before my very eyes, in my very

hearing, he continues this—this outrage! Handforth!" he thundered. "How dare you!"

Edward Oswald literally dumped the ham into the arms of Tregellis-West and Watson, and they were compelled to take it in order to save the dish from destruction. Handforth breathed more freely, and he faced Mr. Crowell with perfect confidence. He couldn't explain, of course, but he always had that trump card up his sleeve—he was doing all this with Mr. Fakenham's full permission!

"I expect it seems a bit rummy, sir," he said cheerfully, "but it's just a little idea, you know. A sort of junior celebration. We're going to have a big spread, and we're collecting the supplies——"

"Stop!" gasped the Form-master. "Are you telling me, Handforth—are you actually informing me—that you have come here to annex all the necessary food for this outrageous orgy?"

"Yes, sir," replied Handforth coolly.

"Good heavens!" said Mr. Crowell, utterly aghast. "This—this audacity is utterly beyond my——"

"Is anything the matter, Mr. Crowell?" said a new voice.

Mr. Beverley Stokes had appeared—also fetched hither by Mrs. Poulter's orders. The good lady had taken very prompt measures, it seemed.

"I am glad you have come, Mr. Stokes," said the Form-master thickly. "I am very glad you have come! This—this poor boy has taken leave of his senses! I not only discovered him leading a raid upon the kitchens, but he is actually intent upon continuing it under my very eyes! He will probably brazen it out in front of yours!"

Mr. Stokes regarded Handforth curiously.

"Well, young man?" he asked.

"Well, sir, what's the matter?" asked Handforth serenely. "All I want is to take all the grub that I can lay hands on, so that we can have a feed. Of course, I don't expect you to understand, but all these chaps—Hullo!" he added, with a start. "They've gone! They've all bunked!"

"I am not at all surprised," said Barry Stokes. "It appears that the other boys have more sense than you have, Handforth—and I hold you to blame for this outrageous piece of conduct."

"That's all right, sir! As Form captain I accept full responsibility," said Handforth. "I'm going to carry on with the raid whether you like it or not. I don't mean to be cheeky, sir, but when I start a thing, I finish it."

"You see?" said Mr. Crowell, in something like a bark.

"Yes; and there is obviously something behind this," said Mr. Stokes quietly. "The boy would never act in this fashion unless he had been misled. I seem to remember that Handforth is peculiarly prone to believe all that is said to him. I fancy he has been duped!"

"Duped, sir!" said Handforth, grinning. "No fear, sir! Mr. Fakenham told me—I—I mean— Oh, corks! The fact is——"

"Mr. Fakenham?" repeated Mr. Stokes gently. "Come, Handforth, let us hear the rest. Who is this Mr. Fakenham?"

Outside the door, a number of Removites were listening intently, and they glanced at one another with dawning enlightenment.

"I'm sorry, sir," said Handforth. "But I can't say any more. Anyhow, I'm going on with this raid. I've got full permission—— That is——"

"Full permission from Mr. Fakenham, eh?" interrupted Mr. Stokes. "We are progressing, young 'un! But when we find out who Mr. Fakenham is, we shall probably be at the root of the matter."

Handforth suddenly gave a violent start.

"But—but you know him, sir!" he gasped. "You know Mr. Fakenham!"

"I can assure you I do not," said Mr. Stokes.

"But—but——" Handforth stared, bewildered and aghast. "But you must know him, sir!" he panted. "He spoke to you in the corridor! He's our new Housemaster, and he gave me permission——"

"I think," said Mr. Stokes, "that we are beginning to see daylight!"



CHAPTER 16.

POOR OLD HANDY!

MR. BEVERLEY STOKES went to the door, and opened it suddenly. About a dozen juniors started back, looking guilty.

"Come in, boys," said Mr. Stokes blandly. "You were engaged in this little affair, so we might as well thrash it out together."

They trooped in rather sheepishly.

"It was Handforth's idea, sir——" began Hubbard.

"You are wrong, Hubbard: it was Mr. Fakenham's idea," said the Housemaster. "Now, Handforth, let us hear the details. But, first of all, I must inform you that I am the Housemaster of this House——"

"That's where you're wrong, sir," interrupted Handforth triumphantly. "Mr. Fakenham's the new man. I met him in the lane to-night, and I brought him up to the school, and took him in."

"You mean, he took you in!" said Fullwood. "Oh, you howling chump! You've been spoofed!"

"Spoofed!" breathed Handforth.

"Spoofed with a vengeance, I should imagine," smiled Mr. Stokes. "Let me assure you, Handforth, that no new Housemaster has been appointed, and this young man—this Mr. Fakenham—has absolutely no authority. If he gave you any instructions, you may be sure they were given with the

(Continued on page 43.)

Thrills and Mystery!

Detective Adventure!

THE LION - TAMER'S SECRET!

A gripping yarn of
NELSON LEE & NIPPER



CHAPTER I.

NELSON LEE REFUSES.

"PEACHES, cream and muffins!" Nipper grinned, eyeing the table in hungry delight. "Now, that's what I call a tea, guv'nor, and I'll——"

Clang! Clang! Clang!

The harsh jangle of the front-door bell cut into Nipper's words and brought an irritated frown to Nelson Lee's face. They had spent a particularly tiring day, and a full-armed ring of that sort usually meant more trouble.

Sure enough, the dining-room door opened a moment later, and the buxom housekeeper peeped in.

"Somebody wants you urgent, Mr. Lee," she gasped. "An' it's rainin' cats an' dogs! But I don't like the looks of 'im, so I've left 'im on th' doorstep——"

"You'd better show him into the consulting-room, Mrs. Jones," Nelson Lee interrupted. "And please say we'll be with him in a few minutes."

Then Mrs. Jones did a strange thing. She came slowly forward, gasping and wriggling. Her face turned purple with rage and she opened her mouth to scream, when the queerest visitor who had ever entered the house in Gray's Inn Road stepped from behind her ample form.

Nipper stared, then broke into choking laughter at the sight of a fiery nose and ghastly white cheeks showing beneath a ridiculously tiny bowler hat.

"Crikey!" Nipper gasped. "A clown—in full rig! He must think we're a circus, guv'nor!"

"That'll do, Nipper," Nelson Lee said sharply. "Er—you needn't wait, Mrs. Jones. I'll see our visitor out."

Mrs. Jones glared at the clown, sniffed and retired with her nose in the air. The fellow looked so miserably thin that Nipper felt inclined to offer him the peaches and cream—but he didn't, when he noticed the frown on the guv'nor's face.

"Now, sir," Nelson Lee said, "as you've forced your way in here, perhaps you'll state your business briefly."

"Sorry, Mr. Lee, but I just had to see you quickly," the clown answered. "I'm Joe Imple, of Halloran's circus, and I've rushed up between shows to ask you to accompany me back to Chesham. It's a matter——"

Nelson Lee shook his head decisively.

"I cannot possibly take another case, Mr. Imple," he interrupted. "I have important work to do in London. I dare not leave here at present."

"Not even to save a life, Mr. Lee?" Imple asked quietly.

"That's exactly why I must stay—to prove a man innocent of murder," Lee explained.

"And I want you to save one from being murdered," Imple answered. "Young Tony's only living now by accident—and he won't live long, if you don't find out who's after him."

"Nonsense, man!" Lee snapped. "You have police in Chesham. In any case, you don't seriously mean that anyone is trying to kill one of your staff?"

"But I do, sir," Imple replied. "It isn't a case for the police—they'd only laugh at me." He fished deeply into his baggy pants, and held out a crumpled slip of paper. "I only thought Tony Hedge was unlucky—until I found these scraps and arranged them in order."

Nelson Lee glanced at the paper, and for the first time a look of interest showed in his face. Peeping over his shoulder, Nipper stared in bewilderment at the odd bits of writing that formed a strangely dramatic word-puzzle.

. will not penny
. work is done. When
word is ended
thousand paid. final.
The snake blu

"What's it mean, guv'nor?" Nipper muttered. "Doesn't seem to make sense."

"I found them bits round the camp-fire, young sir," Imple explained. "Somebody'd torn a letter up and meant to burn it, but those scraps had dropped in dead ash. I puzzled over 'em for hours, an' at last I made sense of 'em."

"And perhaps I can do the same," Nelson Lee said, his shrewd grey eyes now hard as flints. "Listen, Nipper: 'I will not pay another penny until the work is done. When I have word that it is ended, the thousand will be paid. This is final. The snake blunder——'" He glanced up from the paper to the eager clown. "What is the snake blunder—do you know that, Imple?"

"That's what made me certain someone was out to kill Tony," Imple answered quickly. "An Indian viper was found in Tony's bed two nights ago—we thought it had escaped by accident, and had got in there for warmth."

"Who is this Tony Hedge?" Lee asked.

"A young trick-rider, who's been with us since he could walk," Imple explained. "One o' the best, he is, and it beats me why anyone'd want to hurt him. If I only knew who'd sent that letter, or who received it——"

"You wouldn't be asking for our help," Lee cut in. "It's a serious business, Imple, and

I'd like to help you, but you see how I'm placed."

The old clown looked so downcast at Lee's fresh refusal that Nipper decided something must be done to help him.

"What about me going, guv'nor?" he asked eagerly. "The affair you're engaged on is mostly a confab with expert analysts, and I'm no good at that game. But I might be able to help Mr. Imple and this Hedge kid—why not let me run down with him?"

"Because it's not a job for you to tackle alone," Nelson Lee answered. "If Imple's suspicions are correct, you'd be working in the dark against a hardened tough who'd as soon kill two lads as one."

"If Mr. Imple can get me a job in the circus, nobody's going to suspect what I'm there for," Nipper said shrewdly. "I'll only be one of the crowd, guv'nor."

"Please let him come," Imple pleaded. "I'm working on me own, Mr. Lee. I dare not trust a soul in the place—for any man might be the swab I'm trying to find."

Nelson Lee nodded slowly.

"Well, you can go, young 'un," he said; "but keep in touch with me if anything happens—no trying to get the chap on your own!"

"Right-ho, guv'nor," Nipper promised cheerfully; but he fairly ran Joe Imple out of the house, before Nelson Lee could think of any more unpleasant conditions.

CHAPTER 2.

NIPPER'S DARING!

DURING the run to Chesham, Joe explained that he would have to enter the ring for the evening show the moment they arrived. He suggested that Nipper might like to watch the performance until he was free, and Nipper immediately agreed.

"I'll see the show all right, and I'll see the fellows who run it," he said. "They'll have no idea I'm watching 'em, and a crook's eyes sometimes tell a lot more than his tongue."

An hour later, Nipper dropped quietly into a front seat at the shilling side, and the huge tent quickly filled to capacity. Nearly a thousand people were visiting Halloran's circus that evening, but to these Nipper paid no attention—his eyes were all on the sawdust ring and those engaged in it.

Footmen in gaudy blue and gold uniforms arranged ladders and hoops round the ring, whilst a brass band blared noisy ragtime, and Joey Imple went seriously about the job of getting in everyone's road. The moment a strip of carpet was carefully laid down Joe was sure to come along and trip over it—all clever fooling that had the audience cackling like hens in about two minutes.

Then Dan Halloran, as ringmaster, listened to Joe's cheek and ended by chasing him round and round the ring. But Joe whistled a mule to his rescue, and the pair of them made Halloran seek protection amongst the audience, and kept him there until he begged Joe's pardon.

After that, the serious work of the evening began. The queen of the ring did dazzling bare-back riding, shattered paper hoops, and made her dangerous stunts appear as easy as eating cake. Then acrobats, trapezists, and animal trainers performed such amazing feats of skill and daring that Nipper had almost forgotten his real reason for being in the place—until the band suddenly stopped and Ringmaster Halloran held up a hand for silence.

"Ladies an' gen'l'men," he called loudly, "I am about to interdooce you to Master Tony Hedge and Tornado, his wild, untamed mustang. You will watch Tony's amazin' control of this savage beast, and you'll think Tornado meeker than Mary's lamb. But that yar mustang, ladies an' gen'l'men, is packed tight wi' deceit, and I'll make a present o' five pounds to anyone who rides him twice roun' th' ring!"

Before the applause had died away, a tiny figure in glittering silver spangles dashed into the ring astride a yellow nag that seemed to be made of wire and whipcord. It bucked and reared, and though Tony brought it to a stand in the centre of the ring, it looked as much like "Mary's lamb" as a man-eating tiger would have done.

Nipper could see that Tony's face was wet with perspiration, and that a puzzled frown marked his forehead. The horse was trembling in every limb, its ears were laid back and only the whites of its eyes could be seen. To Nipper it was plain that Tornado was in a mad rage, and when he saw the lad wave Halloran and Imple away from him, he guessed that they were going to see fireworks.

For just one second the mustang stood as still as if carved of stone. Then, suddenly screaming and madly pawing the air with flashing hoofs, it began to tear round the ring like a lean greyhound! Just as quickly it stopped, flung up its heels and hissed like a spiteful cat when it found that Tony was not to be shifted.

Time after time it tried to savage the leg of its plucky rider; but Tony was up to every mean trick in its wicked head, and he was busily teaching it manners with whip and spur when disaster happened!

Quite suddenly, Tornado stopped a wild buck, jumped sideways, and made straight for Halloran! The ringmaster also jumped—for the barrier—and Tony turned the nag's head round just in time to save his boss from bared teeth. Then snap went a stirrup strap, and in one frenzied buck Tornado tossed the lad clean over its head and was on him, in screaming, insane fury!

Both audience and ring staff were paralysed with fear and amazement, but Nipper saw that Tony was hardly conscious and in dire need of help. With one bound he was over the barrier, and as Tornado swept in to complete his work, Nipper's hand shot down to the hanging reins, and he pulled the brute's head aside by sheer strength!

The maddened beast turned on him with snapping jaws, but Nipper kept an iron hold on the reins and lashed out with a hard fist when Tornado's mouth came too near him. The creature next tried to get rid of him by doing another wild turn round the ring; but Nipper hung on, taking great, raking strides and swinging all his weight on the brute's bit.

Luckily for Nipper, Tony had already tired the animal, and at last it began to slow in its stride and to show signs of exhaustion. By this time, also, the circus staff had recovered from their surprise, and Halloran, with three others, sprang to the mustang's head.

Tornado knew then that he was beaten, and whinnied pitifully. But the sound was drowned in the burst of cheering and handclapping that rolled round the tent—a compliment that made Nipper wish he was anywhere but in this brilliantly-lighted place.

"Lad, you've saved Tony Hedge from a terrible mauling, and I don't know how to thank ye," Halloran yelled, above the roar. "The brute's stark, staring mad, an' I'll have him shot before he has the chance—"

"Perhaps he has reason for his madness," Nipper interrupted suddenly. "Look at the blood trickling from beneath the saddle, Mr. Halloran! Loosen it, boys, there's something wrong here!"

Whilst the men were busy with the surcingle, Tony came limping across the ring, leaning heavily on Imple's arm.

"Can't understand Tornado turning on me like that," he was saying. "I could do anything with him before, and— My hat, what a rotten trick!"

He might well say it, for as the saddle was loosened Nipper slipped his hand carefully beneath it and drew out—a spiked leather collar!

"Crikey!" Joe muttered indignantly. "We've been blaming Tornado, and my old mule would ha' acted as bad!"

It was a wretched trick, and Halloran looked grim and sour as he took the collar from Nipper's hand. "We'll inquire into this later," he said. "But the show's got to go on, and if ever I can do anything for you, young master—"

Joe nudged Nipper, and Nipper grabbed his chance instantly.

"You can now, sir," he grinned. "I'm looking for a job, and I'm pretty useful with nags. If you've room for an extra hand, I'll earn my corn, Mr. Halloran."

"You're engaged," Halloran answered promptly. He would have promised anything at the moment. "Tony, you'll do nothing more to-night, so look after this chap and bring him to me soon's the show's over. Now, clear the ring, lads, and let's get on with the business."

CHAPTER 3.

JUST IN TIME!

MIDNIGHT had struck before Dan Halloran was free to see Nipper, and he looked a bit doubtful when the lad reported to him. After all, Nipper hadn't the cut of a stable-lad, and the circus "boss" knew that some youngsters would do almost anything to get in a travelling show.

"And what home or school have you run away from, me lad?" he asked, eyeing Nipper suspiciously.

"None, sir," Nipper answered. "You give me the job, Mr. Halloran, and nobody's coming round looking for me, I can promise you that."

"Um—and what's your name?" Halloran grunted, only half convinced.

The name of Dick Hamilton told him nothing, but after several other questions, he seemed satisfied, and engaged Nipper at fifteen bob a week and free board. Then Tony hauled him off to the caravan he already shared with Joe Imple, and though Nipper tried to pump the youngster about the events that led to Tornado's madness, he could learn nothing.

"You know as much as I do," Tony assured him. "I can only say I saddled the nag as usual, then went off to get into my own glad rags. A dozen fellows might have been near him for all I can say. I only wish I could lay hands on the brute."

"So do we," Joe agreed sourly. "But that's enough talking for to-night, boys. We move on to Wendover to-morrow, and that means a five a.m. start. So into your bunks and not another word, or I'll get busy with a strap."

Tony winked and grinned at Nipper, but in less than five minutes they were asleep. To Nipper, it seemed just about another five before the old clown roused him out and told him to get busy.

That was the beginning of one of the hardest days Nipper had ever spent. Breakfast was over in ten minutes, then came two hours of hard labour in the shape of dismantling and packing the tents, and before eight o'clock they were ready for the road.

"You chaps pop inside the van and keep quiet until we reach Wendover," Joe advised. "You'll find plenty to do when we get there—"

"No, you don't, Imple," said a sneering voice behind Nipper. "Halloran tells me he's taken on a new stable-kid, so he comes under my orders, an' I want him."

Turning quickly, Nipper found Leon Gonzala, the lion-tamer, glaring sourly at him. The fellow's pasty face was marred by a heavy frown, and his beady little eyes warned Nipper that he was in a vile temper and ready to quarrel with anyone.

"Give the kid a chance, Gonzala," Joe protested. "He's new to the game—"

"He won't be by to-night," Gonzala sneered. "I've a way of training animals, an' I'll begin trainin' this one now!"

His hand shot out, and a finger and thumb took a vice-like grip on Nipper's ear. But the next second he yelped, for Nipper swung round and landed a drive to the chin that cracked home like a pistol shot!

"Keep your paws to yourself, Gonzala!" he yelled. "If I'm under your orders, give 'em decently and I'll carry them out. But I'm not a worm— No, you brute, you don't!"

He sprang in like a tiger, for Gonzala had lifted the heavy hunting-whip he carried and slashed straight at his face!

Nipper took that first and only slash on his arm. The next second, he had torn the whip from the lion-tamer's hold and was paying him back with interest. Twice the lash curled round Gonzala's shoulders with searing force—then the whip was torn from his hand in turn, and Dan Halloran stepped between them.

"That'll do, boy," he said sharply to Nipper. Then he rounded on Gonzala. "I've warned you before about your beastly temper, and next time—out you go! Imple, you're in charge of these lads from now on, and if Gonzala tries any more tricks, report to me at once!"

He flung away in a royal rage, and Gonzala slunk off in the opposite direction without a word. But the venomous glance he threw at Nipper told the lad that he had made a bad enemy.

The moment they arrived at Wendover, however, they had no time to think of anything but work. Halloran was a hustler, and Nipper began to understand that circus life is not altogether made up of doing clever things and receiving generous applause.

Whilst the workmen were putting up the red seat-planks for the evening show, the rest of the company were helping to rear the huge audience tent, and Nipper took care to keep close to Tony's side. He was very wide awake during the hour that followed, for the dangerous jobs on which they hurriedly worked gave Tony's secret enemy ample opportunity, and Nipper felt certain that such a chance would not be missed.

But the great tent was raised and corded into position without anything happening, and he began to think that he was worrying without need—when death struck out at Tony like a bolt from the blue!

Three or four men were fixing a trapeze platform high up near the roof, a wooden structure to be used by Tony in a hair-raising diving stunt that same evening. Their own jobs finished, the two lads were standing in the centre of the

ring, when some instinct warned Nipper to look upwards.

The sight he saw made his heart jump into his throat. Even as his glance fixed on the wooden run sixty feet overhead, a heavy iron-shod pulley-block came whirling down—and straight for Tony's head!

With one wild yell, he sprang at the lad and pushed him aside. Despite his quickness, he barely saved Tony's skull from being cracked like an eggshell, for the block caught the lad a sickening blow on the shoulder and sent him to earth with a cry of pain!

Halloran, Imple, and a crowd of others were round the lads in a second, and, whilst Nipper and the clown tended the dazed Tony, Halloran turned his wrath on those above.

"Come down there, you careless brutes!" he bellowed. "You've nearly killed Tony Hedge—come down, and give an account of yourselves!"

By the time Tony got shakily to his feet, the three fellows had swarmed down the ropes, and Nipper was not surprised to see that one of them was Leon Gonzala. The other pair looked white and upset, but Gonzala scowled ferociously at the lads and turned protestingly to Halloran.

"No good you howling like that, boss," he began, interrupting Halloran's tirade. "I tripped over the thing and nearly came down meself. It was an accident, and it wasn't my fault these kids were lazin' where they had no right to be."

Nipper's mouth opened to give him the lie direct, but he suddenly remembered that the gov'nor never accused a man until his guilt was certain—and nobody could prove Gonzala guilty of deliberate intent in this case. The fellow's account of the "accident" was such that it might have happened to anyone. Though he inwardly raged, Nipper kept a tight hold on his temper, while Halloran dressed the lion-tamer down with a bitter tongue.

CHAPTER 4.

NIPPER'S DISCOVERIES!

BUT Nipper voiced his suspicions to Joe and Tony the moment they were alone. "It may have been an accident, but it looked to me as if the block was kicked from the platform just when you were in the exact spot to get it on the napper, son," he said. "This is the third 'accident' that's nearly put you to sleep, Tony, and I'd give a lot to know what connection Gonzala had with the other two."

Tony's eyes opened wide.

"But you don't mean to hint that he's deliberately trying to kill me," he said. "You've no cause to love him, Dick, but that's a bit too thick, isn't it?"

"I don't think so," Nipper answered quietly. "And look here, Joe, I think it's time we told Tony what he's up against, and why I'm here."

"You're quite right, Master Nipper," Joe agreed, and Tony's eyes opened wider than ever when he heard of Imple's hurried dash to Gray's Inn Road, of Nelson Lee's refusal to take up the case, and how he had sent his famous assistant to take his place.

"But why should anybody pay a thousand to have me put away?" he protested. "Oh, you're dreaming, Joe! I'm only the son of an old gipsy woman, and not worth sixpence to anyone."

"I'm beginning to wonder about that old gipsy woman," Joe nodded. "Mother Hedge drifted

into the circus as a fortune-teller, bringing you as a six months old infant. She always claimed you as her son, but when she died a year later we couldn't find she had any relatives, so you were looked after by the circus mother."

"Then Tony's been here about fifteen years," Nipper said musingly. "How long has Gonzala been with you, Joe?"

"Less than twelve months—an' that's a year longer than he ought to have been!" Joe grunted.

"And these accidents started about a week ago," Nipper continued. "Whoever's responsible for them knows more about Tony than you do, Joe—and I'm keeping on eye on Gonzala until I find he's innocent!"

But Nipper found he had let himself in for a weary task. During the whole of the afternoon and throughout the early evening, he quietly watched the lion-tamer. Gonzala, however, seemed unusually subdued, and went about his business without speaking a word to anybody. It was not until dusk was closing in that Nipper spotted the fellow slipping away in the shadow of the big tent, and even then Gonzala would have eluded him if Nipper had not been an expert at the shadowing game.

The lion-tamer had no suspicion that he was being trailed, but he twisted and turned about in the narrow streets of Wendover, as if he feared half Scotland Yard was on his track. He was evidently taking no chances, but when he suddenly dived into the railway-station Nipper was not a score of yards behind.

For a moment, Nipper thought he was going to board an incoming train. But when he saw Gonzala take up a stand at the end of the platform, he realised that the fellow was there by appointment, and the secrecy of his movements proved that the appointment was of great importance.

A dozen people passed the barrier without Gonzala moving. Then a tall, well-dressed chap about thirty nodded a scowling greeting, and the lion-tamer ranged up alongside him. They strode from the station without exchanging a word, but as they turned down the first quiet street Nipper saw that they were arguing violently.

Creeping closer, he was able to catch a few words—the first of them from Gonzala:

"I've had bad luck, or the job would ha' finished 'fore now, Emerson," he saw saying. "Anyway, I'm wanting money badly, an' you've got to fork out, or I'll put the old man wise to the game you're playing."

"Not another penny until you've done your work," Emerson snapped back. "You've had two hundred in less than a month, and I want results before I part with any more!"

"But I tell you I'm doing my best," Gonzala protested. Then he dropped his voice, and Nipper guessed that he was recounting Tony's miraculous escapes—for now, Nipper had no doubt but that Gonzala was responsible for the "accidents."

More than once, Emerson glanced nervously round, and Nipper was forced to drop further behind. The precious pair worked by quiet streets back to the station, and they were parting at the entrance when Gonzala momentarily raised his voice.

"Then I'll claim the thousand before morning. I've fixed things to a finish this . . ." drifted faintly back to Nipper's sharp ears. Then the pair parted company, and Gonzala strode swiftly away in the direction of the circus.

Nipper acted now without hesitation. He was a complete stranger to Emerson, so he boldly

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followed along the platform, waited until the fellow boarded a London-bound train, then dashed away to the station telephone.

In less than two minutes he was through to Gray's Inn Road, and it was Nelson Lee's voice that challenged his call.

"Guv'nor, you'll have to take a hand in this game," he said quickly. "There's a chap just left this station—Wendover—in the seven-ten. He's named Emerson, second compartment, third coach, and he's employing Gonzala, the lion-tamer, to put out Tony Hedge. What's that—no, I've no idea why, but I'm thinkin' Emerson's end of the business will tell us." He gave hurried details of the rogue's appearance, then went on: "I'm dashing straight back to the circus, and I won't be happy till I've put Gonzala where he can do no more harm. No, I won't tackle him myself, guv'nor; I'll put Halloran wise and let him round-the mongrel up!"

But, in giving the promise, Nipper had forgotten the time, and that little detail was to land him in one of the most nerve-racking adventures he had experienced. Unconscious of this, however, he parted cheerily from the guv'nor, thinking his job was happily ended, when it had only really begun!

CHAPTER 5.

GONZALA'S REVENGE!

NIPPER reached the circus in time to see late-comers hurrying through the turnstiles, and he could have kicked himself for forgetting that both Halloran and Imple would already be in the ring.

"Crikey—that's torn it!" he muttered, hesitating by the staff entrance. "Halloran won't listen to a word until the show's over, and he'd whip me from the ring if I butted in now. Anyway, I've got to keep Tony out of harm's way, and I'm dashed if I like him risking his neck in the ring, with Gonzala on the war-path."

Hurrying to Tony's van, he liked the idea still less. He found the young trick-rider struggling into silk tights, but so obviously in pain that his face was white and drawn.

"Gosh!" Nipper murmured. "You don't look very fit for the ring to-night. What's up—shoulder hurting?"

"Like billy-oh," Tony answered, trying to grin. "It's stiffened up since Gonzala dropped the block on it, but I've jolly well got to go through with my turn."

"You jolly well won't," Nipper said, after one

glance at the great purpling bruise Tony carried. "It's a bed and a doctor for you, an' no argument about it, either!"

"Can't be did," Tony replied. "You know the new cycle-dive is on for the first time to-night, an' if I don't go through with it the audience'll tear the show to bits."

"You're not going on anyway," Nipper said definitely.

"Rats!" Tony answered. "I've got to, or ruin Dan's show."

He tried pluckily to get into his silks, but the effort brought a groan to his lips, and he fell back, half-dazed with pain, against the wall of the van.

"You get those rags off, kid," Nipper ordered. "Get 'em off, now, and no back-chat."

Tony answered by making another effort to clothe himself.

"It's no good—I'm done," he said dully.

But Nipper had made up his mind, and was determined to take Tony's place. He was about the same build as the circus waif, and if Gonzala tried any fancy tricks, Nipper reckoned he was wide enough awake to counter them.

He quickly peeled the silks from the lad, tucked him comfortably into his bunk, and set about getting into Tony's things. They might have been made for him, so well did they fit; then, seeing Tony had dropped asleep, he quietly left the caravan and hurried to the curtained ring entrance.

He was barely in time, for Halloran's voice was already announcing the wonderful new turn. Briefly, Nipper had to ride a bike along the roof platform clean over the edge, kick free of the bike, and dive into a ten-foot tank of water. It was a regular movie thrill—but everything was measured to an inch, and it only needed a cool head to carry it through.

Before Nipper had time to think of danger, a footman held the all-silver bike, Nipper mounted, and the curtains were drawn with a swish. He did two turns round the ring, then the bike was hooked fore and aft, and he was hauled swiftly to the roof.

He felt quite cool and confident, and—following out Tony's programme—he stood for several seconds looking down at the wildly applauding audience.

Halloran held up his hand. The band stopped instantly, the vast throng sat tense and silent, and Nipper stepped back to mount his machine!

And then, without the slightest warning, the ropes holding the front of the run gave way, and Nipper dropped off into space! He had one second to think—and in that second he twisted sideways and dived headlong for a hanging trapeze!

It was a chance in a thousand, and a moment's hesitation meant that he would have been flung like a stone to the ring floor sixty feet below. As it was, he dived twenty feet or more expecting nothing but death—then his hands hit the bar with a smack that split the skin, and he started to swing like a huge, animated pendulum!

He remembered little more of that awful mishap. He had a hazy idea that serious-faced acrobats were rushing frenziedly along the upper ropes to his aid, and that a thousand people were all yelling instructions at once. But the agony of wrenched arm-sockets dulled his brain to the exclusion of all else, his torn hands lost their grip—and for the second time in almost as many seconds he plunged to earth!

But, by then, a net had been rushed beneath the trapeze, and he dropped into it like a weighted sack, just as a dozen fellows tightened their hold. The net, not yet fully stretched,

sagged beneath his meteor-like plunge—then the sauded floor seemed to shoot up and hit him!

Nipper's next waking thought was that a huge red moon was dancing in the sky. But he soon realised that he was staring at a shaded lamp and lying in a big white-painted room.

"He's coming to now, I think," he heard someone say, and instantly recognised the voice.

"Hallo, guv'nor!" he cried gladly. "Where did you spring from—an' where are we, anyway?"

"In hospital, young 'un," Nelson Lee explained. "You've been asleep for five hours, but I think you'll do now."

Then Nipper remembered.

"Crikey!" he yelled, in alarm. "What about Tony? Gonzala said he'd finish the job to-night—"

"Tony's here, and Gonzala has played his last trick," Lee answered. He beckoned, and Tony and a white-bearded stranger stepped nearer the bed. "Tony, tell Nipper what happened after he dropped."

"It took Dan Halloran about ten minutes to convince the crowd you were still kicking," Tony explained. "While he was doing that, Joe found the platform ropes had been nearly cut through, and your weight finished 'em. He remembered that Gonzala was the last man on the platform, but the beggar had vanished by then, an' Joe's helping the police hunt him now."

"And I hope they get the rotter," Nipper grunted. "But what about his partner, Emerson—where does he come in?"

"Your 'phone message solved all that," Nelson Lee said. "Young 'un, this is Lord Duncombe—he'll explain what you've done for him and Tony."

"More than we can ever repay," Duncombe smiled. "When I tell you that Tony is my son, you'll begin to understand."

Nipper stared. Tony—circus waif—the son of old Lord Duncombe!

"Gosh!" he gasped. "Then why's he in a travelling show, sir?"

Duncombe smiled sadly.

"Tony was stolen fifteen years ago," he answered. "I searched England, offered rewards, and employed detectives for years, but all in vain. Then, a month ago, a dying gamekeeper confessed to stealing the lad, but died before he could give me a reason for his evil deed. Hoping again, I advertised in every paper in the land, but no word came until Mr. Lee suddenly appeared, this evening."

"Your 'phone message made my task easy, young 'un," Lee explained. "I shadowed Emerson, and when I saw him enter Lord Duncombe's home, I recalled the old scandal of the stolen heir. In Duncombe's presence I challenged Emerson—he's Tony's cousin—and he confessed that he had the boy stolen, and that Gonzala had seen the adverts and reckoned to make more out of him than by telling Duncombe the truth."

"And so poor old Emerson loses the Duncombe millions," Nipper grinned. "Well, Tony, we nearly lost our necks through him, so it's a fair exchange."

"You can laugh," Tony answered seriously, "but I'll never forget that I owe you my life—"

"Oh, chuck it, Tony!" Nipper growled. "You're a high-brow blue-blood now—but I'll punch your nose if you mention thanks again!"

THE END.

(More thrilling detective adventures of NELSON LEE and NIPPER next week in another gripping complete yarn—"THE GREEN EYE!")

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION

FORM No. 51.

SECTION

A

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SECTION

B

MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS.

I, Member No..... (give Membership No.) hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This makes me..... (state number of introductions up to date) introductions to my credit.

SECTION

C

NEW READER'S DECLARATION.

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(FULL NAME)

(ADDRESS)

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INSTRUCTIONS.—Reader Applying for Membership. Cut out TWO complete Application Forms from Two copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. On one of the forms fill in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C. Then write clearly your full name and address at bottom of form. *The second form* is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at bottom of form. Both forms are then pinned together, and sent to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4. **Member Applying for Bronze Medal:** It will be necessary for you to obtain six new readers for this award. For each new reader TWO complete forms, bearing the same number, are needed. On one of the forms fill in Section B, crossing out Sections A and C, and write your name and address at bottom of form. The other form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at the bottom of

the form. Now pin both forms together and send them to the Chief Officer, as above. One new reader will then be registered against your name, and when six new readers have been registered, you will be sent the St. Frank's League bronze medal. There is nothing to prevent you from sending in forms for two or more new readers at once, provided that each pair of forms bears the same date and number.

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THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE

THE CHIEF OFFICER'S CHAT

All **LETTERS** in reference to the League should be addressed to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Flectway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Any enquiries which need an immediate answer should be accompanied by a stamped and addressed envelope.

The Big News.

MY first duty this week is to explain in a few words what has been happening. It is soon told. There has been an immense advance in every way. Applications for the St. Frank's League Badge have poured in by every post, and the rush goes on.

At the splendid rate we are travelling, with new members rolling up in hundreds per week, the time will soon be here when we shall have to put the Silver Medal into commission. After that comes the Gold Medal!

The Great Badge Boom.

But I have to weigh in with the details of the Badge. Requests are dealt with as they arrive, and every day sees a fresh batch of Badges despatched to members of the League. All this is more than gratifying.

I cannot, of course, answer every individual request other than by the official letter I am sending out. But where there is a special question asked, then I am on to it, and the writer has a personal reply. I would rather any particular fact be sent under separate cover. That simplifies matters. It is not my intention to overlook any cheery letter sent in, but my chums will realise that these are extra strenuous times, and that for the sake of getting the Badges sent off with celerity it is essential that a routine system should be followed.

Galvanising the League.

That is just what the Badge has done. I don't mean for the lightning space of a second that the S.F.L. was ever doing anything else but swinging on to triumph. But the Badge has accelerated the pace. It has made enthusiasm more pronounced.

It has swept aside the doubts of a few who kept on writing in to say that they felt the Badge was a jolly old myth! A myth! Think of that, now! I have got a Badge in front of me as I write. This Badge has been the means of routing the bunch of scoffers. You know their sort—"I don't believe there ever will be a Badge at all." The doubters have their answer now!

Thanks for Letters.

As a rule, I answer all communications separately. On this occasion I know all my pals will tumble to the facts. I have stacks of missives in front of me, and my best thanks go to the writers.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED!

H. Meek, 9, Fitzhamon Embankment, Riverside, **Cardiff**, wishes to hear from **Cardiff** readers who will help form a club.

D. Desmond, 7, Lyal Road, Bow, **London**, E. 3, wishes to hear from members in his district.

E. Kingerley, 139, Granville Avenue, Long Eaton, near **Nottingham**, wishes to correspond with American and Canadian members.

Louis Rudolf, 280, Amhurst Road, Stoke Newington, **London**, N. 16, wishes to correspond with members in his district interested in stamp collecting.

R. E. Nugent, 13, Western Road, **Aldershot**, wishes to hear from a member in **Australia—Victoria** for preference.

S. Gilbert, 9, Sheldon Street, **Croydon**, **London**, wishes to hear from members in that district.

James Singleton, 23, Orleans Road, Old Swan, **Liverpool**, wishes correspondence with member in **Canada**; subjects football, cricket, racing, reading, biking; also pets. He wants as well to hear from members in his district who are running sports and social clubs.

Napoleon Evans, 8, Dovedale Road, Derry Common, **Erdington**, **Birmingham**, wishes to correspond with a reader keen on natural history.

Peter Pepoe, 7, Caithness Road, West Kensington, **London**, W., wishes to hear from readers.

George Jennings, 22, Peel Street, **Ipswich**, **Suffolk**, wishes to correspond with a chum in **Australia**.

Albert Fitton, 19, New Lane, **Winton**, **Manchester**, wishes to hear from members in his district as he is forming a club.

John Fox, 22, Fox Street, **Hollinwood**, **Oldham**, **Lancashire**, wishes to hear from readers in his neighbourhood.

Eric W. Neale, 9, Regis Road, **Blackheath**, **Birmingham**, wishes to hear from members so as to form a club.

Hec. McFarlane, Wullumulla Street, **Glen Innes**, **New South Wales**, **Australia**, wishes to correspond with O.O.'s in **Great Britain**.

Sidney Stone, 50, Norway Street, **Waterloo**, **Liverpool**, wishes to hear from members in his district.

C. Wray, 53, Southwell Road, **Mansfield**, **Nottingham**, is anxious to hear from motorcyclists in his neighbourhood to arrange runs.

Miss Audrey Hancock, 19, St. Nicholas Church Street, **Warwick**, wishes to hear from **Australian** girl readers who can advise her how to obtain a place as pupil on a ranch.



(Continued from page 34.)

deliberate intention of—er—pulling your leg!”

“One of those River House bounders, I expect, sir!” said Church quickly.

“Quite possibly,” said Mr. Stokes. “In that case, the little mystery is explained, and it appears that you are not guilty of deliberate defiance of authority, Handforth. Mrs. Poulter, I think we can let the matter rest as it stands.”

“I’ll be glad to be rid of them, sir!” said Mrs. Poulter, heartily.

“You’d better go, boys, and I rather fancy, Mr. Crowell, that we must let Handforth off,” said Mr. Stokes dryly. “He has obviously been acting under misapprehension, and we don’t want to be harsh, particularly with a newly-elected Form captain, eh?”

Handforth turned a sickly-looking green.

“Thanks, awfully, sir,” he muttered. “I—I thought— Oh, my hat! Spoofer! Dished, by George! That—that beastly rotter was only—”

He fled, only too glad to escape so easily. Mr. Stokes and Mr. Crowell went off, both of them chuckling. They might not have dealt so easily with any other boy, but Handforth was famous for his credulous nature.

Besides, they knew what he would get from his Form-fellows!

He got it!

“Observe our great skipper!” said Fullwood solemnly, as they all crowded into the lobby. “On his first day of office, he falls into a trap that wouldn’t have deceived an infant—”

“But—but I believe he’s genuine, even now!” gasped Handforth. “He knew everything—knew Mr. Stokes’ name, and even spoke to him out in the passage! How the dickens was I to guess that he was a spoofer? He wanted to hold a little feed, to celebrate his arrival—”

Thump—thump!

Two loud bangs sounded upon the outer door, and Tommy Watson pulled it open.

“Mr. Fakenham!” gasped Handforth.

“There you are—I knew it! By George! I’ll show you whether I was spoofer—”

Then he paused, for he saw that Mr. Fakenham was not alone. Hal Brewster and Georgie Glynn and Dave Ascott, of the River House School, were with him. And Brewster was carrying a little white flag.

“Pax!” he said briskly. “This is a flag of truce, and you’ve got to respect it. We just wanted to know how the wheeze

worked. Do we come in under the armistice?”

“We always respect the white flag,” said Fullwood stiffly.

The visitors came in, and Mr. Fakenham was grinning.

“Did it work?” he asked genially.

“Marvellously, but you wouldn’t have spoofered any other chap,” growled Church.

“Handy went down to the kitchens, and tried to raid the cupboards, and there was a terrific shindy with Mrs. Poulter and Mr. Crowell—”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

The River House contingent howled.

“Allow me to introduce my brother Bob,” said Brewster blandly. “It’s his own moustache, so don’t try to pull it off!”

“You cheeky young ass!” began Mr. Fakenham.

“He’s staying down here for a day or two,” went on Brewster. “I thought it was about time we spoofered you St. Frank’s fellows, and Bob came in handy. Not a bad actor, is he?”

Handforth seemed perceptibly smaller.

“You—you rotters!” he gasped.

“What about the way you treated me this morning?” demanded Hal indignantly. “I came here especially to see you about the footer, and you pushed me off without even discussing the subject! That stain had to be wiped out—and with you as skipper, it was pretty easy!”

“Sorry, old man,” grinned Hal’s brother. “Don’t blame me for all this, you know—Hal egged me on to it, and as I thought it rather a good joke, I entered into the spirit of the thing!”

“But—but you saw Mr. Stokes in the passage!”

“Of course I did—and I had the wind up!” replied Bob Brewster. “I just asked him the way to Fenton’s study, and escaped in about two ticks. He probably thought I was just an ordinary visitor. Upon my word, I’ve never hoodwinked anybody so easily in all my life; you swallowed the yarn whole! And I’d already wagered Hal that it wouldn’t work!”

“We know Handy better than you do, Bob!” grinned Brewster.

“And you invited me to tea, too!” said Handforth, dully.

“Yes, and it was all ready if you had turned up,” replied Hal. “But Bob had time to get to the lane, and we left the rest to him. Anyhow, he gave you a pretty broad hint, didn’t he?”

“A broad hint?”

“Rather!” put in Ascott, grinning. “We made up our minds to jape you chaps, and said to ourselves ‘we’re faking ’em.’”

“Yes, but I don’t see—”

“Didn’t Hal’s brother tell you?”

“Of course I did,” put in Bob Brewster. “I distinctly gave my name as Mr. Weir Fakenham. What more could I say?”

“Help!” moaned Fullwood, clutching at his head. “‘Weir Fakenham’—we’re faking ’em! Oh, my only Sunday topper!

(Continued on next page.)

LORD OF THE REMOVE!*(Continued from previous page.)*

Go out and get a coal-hammer, somebody! And Handy didn't spot it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And we did fake 'em, too! We faked the whole lot of you!" said Brewster, with relish. "This is just to show you what we think of Handy's captaincy! So he's going to make a big feature of japes, is he? He's going to lead the Remove from victory to victory, eh? Well, it's first blood to us!"

"You—you—"

"Remember the white flag," said Hal sternly.

Handforth pulled himself together.

"Just wait until I pay you back—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The River House boys, with Hal Brewster's brother, reeled out into the night, shouting with merriment.

"This," said Fullwood, "is where Handy crawls away and expires!"

"Oh, is it?" said Handforth fiercely. "Do you think I'm whacked by a single jape like this? Wait, my sons! By George! I'll show these River House chaps something! Just leave it to me!"

THE END.

(Handforth is going strong as captain of the Remove! Look out for next Wednesday's full-of-fun long complete story: "HANDFORTH'S FLAG-DAY!")

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